Slavic Studies · Political Science

"This is a truly excellent study of Russian foreign policy since the Cold War. It makes it manifestly clear that Putin consistently acted according to realist logic and that he does not have an imperial agenda. Hopefully, *The Sources of Russian Aggression: Is Russia a Realist Power?* will be widely read in the West, where misconceptions about Putin's thinking abound."
–JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER, University of Chicago

"Sumantra Maitra's work looks carefully, and from a realist perspective, at actual Russian behavior, its implications, and the conclusions we can draw from it, all without the strong ideological spectacles that so many bring to the issues. He rightly concludes that Russian actions are rational, do not need some kind of Russian Sonderweg or civilizational exceptionalism to account for them, and can in large part be explained by its perceptions, justified or otherwise, of threats to its self-defined interests. At a moment when so many observers argue for the inevitability of an open-ended and possibly existential confrontation with Russia, it is timely to consider that a more clear-sighted, realist approach could be more productive for Western policymakers."
–DAVID GEORGE HAMILTON FROST, Baron Frost, The Rt Hon. Lord Frost of Allenton

Moscow indulges in the military use of force and balancing behavior, only when it perceives its interests to be threatened, but seeks to preserve, uphold, or return to the status-quo the moment the threats subside or are neutralized by balancing actions, acting more as a security maximizer, than a power maximizer. *The Sources of Russian Aggression: Is Russia a Realist Power?* suggests that Russia balances against perceived threats and that Russian use of force is directly proportional to any strategic and material loss. Alternatively, Russia behaves like a status quo power when the perceived threat subsides. Sumantra Maitra explains Russia is inherently a reactive power with limited regional aims, which are not commensurate with an aspiration, or capability toward a continental hegemony. The findings have future policy relevance for European/British and American security, as the US grows increasingly isolationist, and NATO and EU rift widens.

SUMANTRA MAITRA is the director of research and outreach at the American Ideas Institute, a senior fellow at the Center for Renewing America, and an elected, associate fellow at the Royal Historical Society, London.

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MAITRA

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Dedicated to my late grandmother, Mrs. Nila Maitra

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What an intending ally trusts to is not the goodwill of those who ask his aid, but a decided superiority of power for action; and the Lacedaemonians look to this even more than others.

At least, such is their distrust of their home resources that it is only with numerous allies that they attack a neighbour; now is it likely that while we are masters of the sea, they will cross over to an island?

—Athenians, to Melians.

Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War (V 84–116)

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Preface

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Some time has passed since I successfully defended my PhD and, in that time, there were changes in European geopolitics, as well as a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic, and a war involving Russia, the subject of this particular study.

However, none of that so far, to my knowledge, had any effect on the overall findings (more on that below) and the book that resulted from the PhD thesis. Incidental errors are also unlikely to change my overall argument, which explored a particular theory of international relations, alongside the actual behavior of a great power. Theoretical studies, as Kenneth Waltz once mentioned, are to determine timeless policy-relevant patterns. This project, while perhaps not comparable, is still, at the end of the day, a theoretical contribution, and not an area-study. The attempt was to find similar policy-relevant patterns that explain the sources of Russian aggression in Europe. My request to the reader is to treat this book holistically, given the fluidity of the situation in Europe, and the subject, Russian foreign policy.

The aim of the study was to explore what explains Russian balancing behavior and its use of military force in Europe. Over the last decade and a half, a shifting geopolitical setting in Europe renewed the question about Russian military capabilities and strategic intentions. Exacerbating the shift has been the evolving balancing behavior of Russia regarding NATO, its use of military force in Georgia, and the invasion of Ukraine. Recent literature, and conventional wisdom attribute Russian military posture and its use of force in Europe primarily to domestic politics, but also to Christian conservatism, civilizational exceptionalism, imperial expansionism, and domestic factors like diversionary war and regime stability. My book attempts to test Russian post-soviet foreign policy, balancing behavior, and the use of military force in Europe, in light of Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory. The aim is simple: to find timeless principles that explain and even predict future Russian aggression.

Moscow indulges in the military use of force and balancing behavior only when it perceives its interests to be threatened, but it seeks to preserve, uphold, or return to the status quo the moment the threats subside or are neutralized by balancing actions, acting more as a security maximiser, than a power maximiser. The book therefore employs a qualitative research design and case study method, relying on secondary literature, military sources, and observed and recorded news. The evidence relies on Russian strategic actions, not Russian rhetoric. The evidence explored suggests that, first, Russia balances against perceived threats, and Russian use of force is directly proportional to any strategic and material loss. Alternatively, Russia behaves like a status-quo power when the perceived threat subsides. Second, Russian military aggression is focused on geopolitical balance and has narrow strategic aims, and Russia either lacks the will and/or capability, or both, to be an expansionist or occupying power. Third, Russia is inherently a reactive power with limited regional aims, which are not commensurate with the aspiration for a continental hegemony. The findings have future policy relevance for European/British and American security, as the United States grows increasingly isolationist, and the rift between NATO and the EU widens.

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The book also explains Russian aggression. It therefore studies Russian behavior and tests it against theory. The war in Ukraine, if anything, consolidates the conclusions of the original PhD thesis: Russia is aggressive when its interests are threatened. Russia lacks continental hegemonic capability. Both are true in the case of Ukraine.

Two peer-reviewed papers resulted from the original thesis.

The first one was "NATO, Russia and Balance of Threat," in the summer 2021 issue of the *Canadian Military Journal*, Department of National Defense, Government of Canada. The second, "A lost opportunity of a grand bargain: Security architecture between NATO and Russia," published in the *International Journal*, Canada, was written immediately prior to the war, around October 2021, and it was published after peer review in the spring of 2022.

In the first paper, I concluded:

> From the evidence observed, the Russian military elite, as well as civilian leadership, were always opposed to NATO territorial enlargement; however, the prospect was not taken seriously in the initial days after the Soviet collapse, and was considered implausible even during the early years of the Yeltsin administration. Each of the subsequent instances of NATO enlargement resulted in a Russian reaction, even when the reaction was varied, but the evidence that any and every NATO enlargement, per se, resulted in Russian revanchism is sparse. In reality, Moscow is quite agnostic, and pragmatic about NATO's relative power superiority. The Kremlin is also aware of Russia's lack of sway in the

European balance. The only instances one can expect Moscow to lash out, are when "direct" strategic interests are threatened, as has been observed in Georgia and Ukraine. The traditional balancers of Europe, the Anglo-Americans, can therefore debate on whether, the European integration would eventually come at a stop, given that there will be logically a limit to enlargement. Second, if Europe will be ever ready to take the security burden, and to balance Moscow as an independent actor. Third, how to eventually find a place of co-existence with Moscow in the European security architecture, or if that is even possible. At the end of the day, whether to compromise with Moscow and let Russia have her own small sphere of influence in parts of Europe where there are already Russian established bases and interests, or to push Moscow out and risk a localized proxy war of attrition, is a policy question beyond the scope of this article.

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In the second paper, written immediately prior to the war, I warned that

since the Russian side needs a security guarantee of a no-expansion pledge, a counter concrete written assurance from Russia and deft back-channel diplomacy to secure stability and a potential grand bargain is to be expected, one that will entail a much-needed focus on the Asian theatre. The Russian president Vladimir Putin's statement contained a reference to the "Euro-Atlantic region" that would include the US and Canada. Russia does not always use this particular rhetoric. It was not an ultimatum to practiced ears, but a plea for a grand bargain. While the total EU GDP, not to mention manpower, dwarfs Russia, Russia still is a great power and has enormous mischief power in its near abroad. Clever diplomacy could initiate a Ukrainian state official neutrality, in a model similar to the Austrian *Neutralitätserklärung* in 1955, an idea that is increasingly gaining traction among a certain section of Washington's policy circles. Combined, all of these policies could potentially end the conflict and initiate a "negative-peace," stop the loss of lives and bloodletting, potentially stabilize Russian insecurity, and in the long run result in better Russian-Western relations, as well as provide a neutral buffer space and a potential long-term security architecture. While chances of a war are high, and bringing Russia back into the mainstream European fold is a long-term aim, for now, a peaceful eastern frontier of EU and NATO would be beneficial for a long-term pivot towards the Asia-Pacific.

Time, and events, I might humbly add, have proven those conclusions and warnings to be prescient.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The dawn of February 24, 2022, saw the army of a major power cross the borders of another sovereign state in Europe. Armies of major powers had crossed borders before, repeatedly in recent years, especially during the War on Terror. This was different. This was a war of aggression and conquest. This was a war of the twentieth century, in the world of the twenty-first. Interestingly, the war is also being fought in a fashion twentieth-century wars were fought, albeit with a sprinkling of newer technologies. It is turning out to be a long slog, a war of attrition. The issues of paramount import changed from hybrid gray warfare and public relations to industrial production, and trench warfare and armor movements in the spring mud.

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The war in Ukraine is a tailor-made moment for a restoration of realism in the international-relations disciplines within the academy. A theoretical framework is as valid as its predictive or explanatory power, and thus far, nearly every single tenet of realism has been vindicated. Realism argues great powers are the primary actors in international anarchy and not institutions and norms. Realism argues that great powers go to great lengths to neutralize their perceived threats. Realism argues that while unsustainable in the long run, threat perceptions are based on geographic proximity and aggregate power. Realism argues that encroaching alliances provoke balancing behavior. Realism argues that revanchism often results in subsequent attrition and quagmires. Realism suggests that war theatre defense is easier than offence, and offence, while overwhelming, often entails a far greater cost. All these theories have so far been proven correct in this conflict.

This book, however, does not dwell on this current war, which is an ongoing event. History ought to be written from detached and distant neutrality, and there will be time for that. This book aims to explain what led to Russia's use of military force and Russian balancing behavior in Europe, with an intention to understand the causes that lead to a great power's military and strategic balancing actions. It is a work in the intersection of contemporary history and international relations, and it aims to redress a theoretical gap in the literature.

WHY RUSSIA?

Why and how is Russia important for a detailed theoretical study? From the Russian tanks in Chechnya for the second time in 1999 to gestures toward Washington right after 9/11, which almost bordered on an alliance formation, to the Russian tanks rolling into Georgia in the summer of 2008, the time frame between 1999 and 2008, under Vladimir Putin, marked the return of Russia as a great power, a major international player, after a decade of relatively reduced influence and decline in status after the Cold War. This return, and renewed power play continues to this day, as evident from the Syria intervention, the ongoing Ukrainian war, and electoral interference in the 2016 American elections, as well as added naval patrolling, forward deployment, and rearmament.[1] The new Russia was more economically stable, compared to the early 1990s, due to bourgeoning oil wealth and energy revenue (although since the interference in Ukraine and renewed sanctions, Russian economic growth has stalled), more authoritarian, and considerably less free and democratic than even a decade back under Yeltsin.

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Moscow was also not shy to demonstrate or use hard power and its renewed strength and confidence, as evident from the 2008 gas crisis with Ukraine, resulting in a subsequent squeeze on Europe; the South Ossetian war of 2008; renewed long-range bomber sorties over the Atlantic since 2007; a rigid, non-negotiating stance to the European ballistic missile defense shield; subsequent Russian foreign policy during the "Arab Spring" and Syrian crisis; to the annexation of Crimea and the current invasion of Ukraine.

No serious wargaming analysis anticipated a full-scale military conflict between Russia and the West.[2] While there were studies simulating a war between Russian and NATO forces, as war-planning studies are supposed to calculate, the statistical possibility of any full-scale conflict between NATO and Russia up until the war in Ukraine remained moderate to low. Russian forces were primarily positioned and structured around key population centers and industries and forward bases, and the formations were mostly defensive in posture, with no visible long-term changes or remodeling.[3] There is no indication even now of Russia actively seeking a full-scale peer-to-peer NATO-Russia conflict, and Russian military literature highlights the understanding of relative martial inferiority in Moscow.[4]

On the other hand, there is no visible intention of any European power, or the United States or China, preparing to go to war against Russia. In fact, the reaction from the United States, both under President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump, after the Georgian war in 2008, the Crimean annexation in 2014, and even the 2016 cyber interference, has been one of caution and restraint, much to the concern of many Allied countries in

Europe. President Joe Biden continued this strategy, while sending weapons to Ukraine, by signaling US reticence in a full-scale NATO Russia conflict. In Ukraine, NATO has steadfastly decided not to actively intervene or take part, and there has been constant such signaling from the US government. One can, therefore, infer from that and argue that if anything, this at least proves a desire from both sides to avoid miscalculated conflict.

And yet, Moscow's revanchism is a concern. Since 2008, Moscow has used military force against two sovereign nation states—Georgia and Ukraine—and it has annexed regions by force within the European continent. Russia has also intervened militarily in Syria, far away from Russian immediate neighborhood, a force projection feat most military analysts thought was impossible for Moscow to carry out. Russia has coerced Europe repeatedly with weaponized gas and energy, has committed cyberattacks in Estonia and other former Warsaw pact countries, started massive rearmament programs, used proxies to shoot down a civilian airliner, committed war crimes in Syria, interfered in the 2016 American elections, and murdered dissidents in the United Kingdom. At the risk of an understatement, one might argue that the assessment of former US president Barack Obama and former secretary of state John Kerry, about Russia being a regional power, acting in a fashion similar to a nineteenth-century great power, were not quite correct, and Moscow remains considerably dangerous, if not directly to the United States, at least to European security and balance of power.[5]

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And that is what leads to the central research question of this book: Why did Russia behave the way it did, and what explains that behavior? What are the sources of Russian use of military force, and what triggered Russia to go to war? The purpose was twofold. One, to answer the primary questions posed above. Russia remains, without doubt, a great power heavily invested in European balance; with its own set of interests and policies, however, Russia also acts independently and contrary to the norms of international law, and often against the interests of broader Euro-American positions. And given Russian belligerence in the last decade alone, which has included one declared war, one proxy war, and one military intervention, it remains topical to understand the sources of Russian military use of force, especially in the context of European security.

Second, this book also attempts, from those answers, to derive an explanation of a bigger theoretical puzzle. To what extent does neorealism explain Russian behavior? Or alternatively, does Russian behavior in Europe broadly conform to the dictates of any realist international relations theory, or a broadly realist paradigm? To put it simply, can we say, with reasonable certainty, that Russia is a realist great power?

The Historical Contradictions

To understand Russia's confusing pattern of demonstrating military power and its reaction to perceived threats, there is a need to elaborate on a central puzzle. From Moscow's relative military weakness in the 1990s to Russian use of military force against Georgia in 2008, the visible changes in the growth of the Russian economy and Moscow's renewed assertiveness are observable. The years from 2000 to 2008 were the most successful years in the Russian economy. Economic growth was around 7 percent, and national income was doubled. The total size of the economy increased six times, from US $221 billion to US $1,348 billion, and measured in dollars, the Russian economy grew even faster than China's.[6] Russia benefited from the growth, as real consumption rose by an average of 15 percent annually, more than twice the size of the GDP.

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Until very recently, scholarly arguments suggested that Russia used this new-found wealth and economic prowess to pursue a more assertive foreign policy in the geopolitical arena. That made perfect logical sense. Centralized government control and state-supported capitalism was a permanent fixture under this process, with an idea that a hierarchical state model is a workable economic model for Russia.[7] Economic determinism was the pressing model for Russia, and this was reflected in the RF Security Council document of May 2002, which stated, "Russia has to avoid being cornered by ideological notions of division between friends and foes. Economic benefits for Russia should become the main factor and criteria of foreign policy orientation."[8] Russia's goal was to use the opportunity of strong economic development to prepare itself to face potential security challenges, and to do that, initial rapprochement with the West was not ruled out.

One of the implications of Russia's economic power was the correlation with its assertive foreign policy. An "aggression index," based on eighty-six events in Russian foreign policy from January 2000 to September 2007, was compiled in a report, a paragraph of which is quoted below:

> We found that as the price of oil rose, the aggressiveness index increased: that is, the more valuable oil became, the more hostile Russian foreign policy became. The reverse was also true: when oil prices dropped in 2001 and 2002, so did Russia's aggression. The relationship proved strongest at the annual level: a $1.48 increase in oil prices yearly correlated with an additional "point" increase in Russian aggression. Oil prices rose from $17.37 a barrel in December 2001 to $73.88 a barrel in September 2007; over that same period, the aggression index rose from 17 to 55. To the best of our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive dataset available to analyze the effect of oil prices on Russian foreign policy; a few events missed here or there will not alter the bigger picture.[9]

Russia would repeatedly use this energy power as a persuasive, coercive diplomatic tool against the European Union, by stopping the supply of oil and gas to Ukraine for show reasons like the price of gas and transit costs. Russia provides approximately a quarter of the natural gas consumed in the European Union; the majority of those exports travel through pipelines across Ukrainian soil prior to arriving in the EU. But, one can gather, this was the Russian response to intimidate the color revolutions, supported by the United States, which were happening in Georgia and Ukraine.

But the Russian military posture has changed since 2008, with the war in Georgia. Moscow carried out substantial reforms and capability transformation in the same time frame. The Russian military also changed and is now used again as an instrument of distant power projection, even when it is still qualitatively inferior to a near peer adversary. This new assertive posture, as well as technological advances, gave a new boost to Russian foreign policy. Russian aggression in the last decade—especially to maintain the buffer zone in Ukraine to prevent it from being too closely aligned to NATO, or deciding that offensive actions are fundamentally a good deterrent, or to preserve the correlation of forces around Russian borders, especially in Georgia—hints at newer grand strategy.

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Recent circumstances in Ukraine and Syria both also highlight a new impulse of seizing the initiative and going on the attack. The Russian military is now more adaptive than in the past; operational variance as well as implementation of planning are observable every day. For example, the Russian operation in Georgia was flawed compared to that in Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, which, in turn, was different from the far superior and sophisticated operations in Syria. Likewise, the Russian cyberattacks in Estonia were a crude cyber assault on grids. Compared to that, the Russian interference in the US elections in 2016 was far more sophisticated.

To quote a Rand Corporation study on the Russian military preparedness, "Russia's historical experience of repeated invasions over the centuries has created a powerful legacy that shapes its defense and foreign policy. Its leaders expect to have privileged interests in the smaller states on Russia's borders; they maintain defensive treaty agreements with several of the former Soviet republics and have military bases in some of them. Owing in part to interpretation of how Western nations have conducted conventional warfare since 1991 and to concerns of a massed conventional aerospace attack on Russia, Russia has invested heavily in air defenses and possesses one of the most advanced and extensive air defense networks in the world. Russia's reforms have augmented its military's offensive potential."[10]

However, the Russian security posture and military doctrines suggested that despite the Russian use of force, the primary intention of the military was the defense of Russian territory and spheres of influence. From military

posture, to training, to capability to force structure, all attest to the idea that the military exists to defend Russia, rather than to project power globally. Likewise, long-range surface-to-air missiles based in Kaliningrad, instead of short-range towed artillery and armor for rapid thrust into enemy territory, signify a deterrent-force instead of an offensive-force posture. Some of the most capable Russian weapons that are exported are systems currently used for air defense weaponry. Russia has also invested in rapid deployment short-range infantry readily available to be deployed in its near abroad, as was visible with ruthless precision in Crimea 2014, instead of long-range expeditionary forces. While the Russian military is far more capable and adaptive than it was in the early 1990s, it is still focused on conventional theatre strike capabilities and preserving Russian territorial integrity and buffer zones instead of projecting Russian global power.

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In short, to use a cliché, Russia remains a "riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."[11] The Russian use of military force in the near abroad is incompatible with Russian force structure and military doctrines and declared intention, and this is one of the many inconsistencies that led to the central research question: When and why does Moscow resort to military force and balancing?

SOME ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

What explains such confusing Russian balancing behavior and the use of military force in Europe? Theoretically, Russian balancing and use of force in Europe are commonly attributed in recent scholarly literature commonly to domestic politics, but also to Christian conservatism, civilizational exceptionalism, imperial expansionism, and domestic factors like the need to divert public discontent or to shore up the regime. Overall, Russia is broadly considered as an expansionist or revanchist power in Europe.[12]

A detailed review is provided in the latter chapters, but a brief summary here is needed. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has consistently tried to restore its privileged position of power in Europe, initially through a short-lived phase of Atlanticism, but soon, followed by a push for multipolarity, which continued despite changes in leaders and governments, and through phases of relative rapprochement and outright hostility. Two assumptions about Russian perspective are common in all analysis and are backed by observable evidence, discussed in further details in the latter chapters.

One, Russian policymakers believe the world is in transition, and unipolarity is unsustainable; therefore, it is important for Moscow to facilitate that multipolarity, as one of the poles. President Vladimir Putin, for example, made this very clear in the 2007 Munich Security Conference, where he

mentioned how the United States is acting as a hyperpower, and there is a need to bring balance in global politics. "Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force—military force—in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts," Putin said, in a speech that was considered a straight break from post-soviet Russian foreign relations.[13] The speech also highlighted the idea that Moscow is predisposed to stop American unipolarity. The logic given was that unipolarity is destabilizing for the world and leads to greater chaos.

Which brings us to the second assumption Russia has about itself being a natural pole. Russia's self-perceived role is one of a historical great power, as a center of influence, best described in the words of Sergey Karaganov, Russian political scientist and head of the prestigious Council for Foreign and Defense Policy: "We want the status of being a great power: We, unfortunately, cannot relinquish that. In the last three hundred years, this status has become a part of our genetic makeup. We want to be the heart of greater Eurasia, a region of peace and cooperation. The subcontinent of Europe will also belong to this Eurasia."[14]

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Causal explanations of Russian behavior can be accordingly divided into broad categories, discussed further in detail later. But to give an example of each, the first category consists of analysts who attribute Russian behavior to the need to shore up the regime. This explanation ties up Russian foreign policy to the variable of Russian domestic concerns, i.e., regarding the stability of the regime in Kremlin.[15] Proponents of this idea claim that Russian policymakers, especially under Vladimir Putin, act like a small coterie of a privileged, interdependent oligarchy, and are paranoid about the survival of their system and regime. Naturally, any disorder is seen as chaos and a push for regime change by external adversaries of Moscow. This line of thinking has arguably influenced the Russian decision-making process, during the breakup of Yugoslavia, the wars in Kosovo, the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as the Western support for democratic movements during the Arab Spring. The Kremlin, according to this understanding, wants to prevent the emergence of a "true democracy," which might instigate similar movements in Moscow, and which might destabilize the Russian ruling elite. In short, to forestall destabilization in Moscow, Russia often takes actions in the near abroad, whenever Moscow feels threatened, by what it perceives to be any snowballing movement, Western-sponsored revolution or regime change, or anarchy in the neighborhood. Most liberal theorists use this lens to explain Russian behavior.

The second causal line claims Moscow to be an expansionist power, motivated by hegemony or imperial ambitions.[16] Scholarly opinion is divided about *what* exactly motivates the said imperialism, whether it is honor, pride, civilizational glory, Christian conservatism, neo-Sovietism, or great power

expansionism and sphere-of-influence politics, but the common thread is that Moscow is considered a hegemonic, expansionist, and even imperial power. Moscow's approach to the post-Soviet states is characterized by a sense of privileged entitlement, and Russia's hegemony is tantamount to establishing Russian political authority as well as a preponderant use of military power.

There is a third (and comparatively rare) line of causal explanation, which is structural in nature.[17] This explanation hints at strategic and material causes behind Moscow's aggression, whether resources or defensible terrain. This explanation, while logical, is relatively underexplored. Most of the scholarly work focuses on individual events, and there is a lack of a systemic, or regional study over a certain period of time, which covers different regimes, different leaders, and different timelines.

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John Mearsheimer, to give one example, has hinted that Moscow's actions in Ukraine in 2014 were a reaction to Western expansionism and "liberal hegemony," which he mentions to be an unnecessary, irrational, and foolhardy mistake. But even his argument fails to explain the halting aggression of Russia, or even the periodic retrenchment, from positions of power and material advantage. For example, in Georgia, where Moscow controlled a huge part of the territory, Russia returned to a status quo once a peace deal was negotiated. And in Ukraine, Russian aggression was limited to a certain territorial sphere. In short, it was not simply expansionism or imperialism on Moscow's part, and there appears to be a method in the madness.

The drawbacks of the abovementioned analyses are manifold. Both constructivist and liberal analysis of Russian foreign policy offer causal explanations about some aspects of Russian behavior. But both suffer from significant disadvantages, as discussed in the following chapters. One, any explanation that resorts to unquantifiable conceptual vacuums, for example the role of honor and pride, and civilizational exceptionalism, are almost all based purely on the "rhetoric" of politicians. While they are of valuable historical importance, they are not strictly objective. A constructivist analysis focusing on the resurgence of the Orthodox Christianity, and the influence of far-right ideologues and how that identity shapes Russian support for far-right parties, would fail to explain the same Russian support for left-wing populist parties around the same time frame. Unless an explanatory theory is capable of at least somewhat answering these differences, it leaves further questions.

That Russian foreign policy is influenced by domestic elements also is insufficient in explaining the differences within foreign policy. Russia has been increasingly getting more assertive since 2007, and barring one sudden alignment during the Western intervention in Libya, it has been antagonistic to NATO and EU interests, regardless of the domestic situation. Vladimir Putin has also overwhelmingly enjoyed positive approval ratings, during the times of both relative retrenchment as well as military aggression. At the time

of the writing this book, especially in the last two years, Moscow has adopted the view that any uprising in any area where Russia has any strategic interest requires some sort of military pushback. While it is not a case study of this particular book, it is unlikely, for example, that Russian use of military force in Syria, Ukraine, and Georgia are determined by either domestic considerations or Orthodox Christian and civilizational considerations.

That said, there is simply no broad overarching theoretical study done so far that can readily explain the differences within post-soviet Russian foreign policy, to ascribe a theoretical understanding on Russian foreign policy. If Russian foreign policy is not explained properly by constructivist lens, of honor, pride, religion, and civilization, and if Russian foreign policy deviations are not fully explained by liberal theories focusing on economy or regime stability, then the only other lens that might provide a theoretical explanation is structural. Structural arguments, therefore, provide a better analytical lens. Is Russia then a realist great power? Perhaps so, but that needs more than scholarship focusing on individual events like the Russian annexation of Crimea. This book, with three different cases, attempts to chart a broader answer to that question and fill a significant gap in the literature.

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For the purpose of this study, I chose three historical cases to document, where I studied Russian foreign policy, use of military force, and/or balancing behavior, in regard to NATO, Ukraine, and Georgia. A detailed explanation behind the logic of case selection is given later, but to briefly summarize, all the three cases involve scenarios that Russia perceived as threatening, whereupon Russia balanced against the threat.

Russia considered NATO expansion to be strategically threatening, and with both Georgia and Ukraine, Russia is engaged or has engaged in military aggression. Both Georgia and Ukraine are also cases where there had been a color revolution and where older pro-Russian regimes were toppled by mass movements, which led to situations Russia considered detrimental to its interests. Both those countries also provide cases where there have been both cooperative phases as well as military aggression and makes it easier to infer causation. NATO, on the other hand, provides greater external validity. NATO being an institution, and not a nation state like Georgia and Ukraine, avoids the allegation of selection bias. Each of these cases constitute individual chapters in this book.

The introduction is followed by a chapter reviewing the relevant literature and summarizing the relevant scholarship dealing with the history of post-soviet Russian foreign policy. The Russian foreign policy, for the purpose of analysis, is divided into four broad periods, or phases. The first phase of an Atlanticist foreign policy and liberalizing economy and pro-Western outlook, immediately after the end of the Cold War, is followed by the start of the second phase around the first Chechen War, to the end of the

Yeltsin presidency, where broad differences in interests of Russian federation vis-à-vis the West are observed. Widespread disillusionment over economic reforms, as well as hard-liner pushbacks with regard to foreign policy, marks this phase, even with relative military decline, in the face of peak American hegemony, culminating in the War in Kosovo and the ascent of Vladimir Putin to power. The third phase, with Putin in power, the second Chechen War, and the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on US soil, marks the return of pragmatic Russia with a huge economic boom. It initially involves steady rapprochement between Russia and the United States, but it quickly ends with increasing rifts due to the Iraq war and the color revolutions in the Russian neighborhood. That is followed by the fourth and final ongoing phase, the return of great power Russia, which involves Russian military aggressions and wars in Georgia and Ukraine. This chapter lays down the background history of Russian foreign policy, as well as provides a thorough rundown of the current theoretical literature and provides an understanding of why that is inadequate.

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The following three chapters are three detailed case studies, namely, exploring and testing Russian reactions, balancing behavior, and use of force, with regard to NATO, Ukraine, and Georgia respectively. Each explores when and why Russia balances against what perceived threats. The chapter on NATO highlights the differences in Russian balancing actions, depending on the interplay of variables, namely, aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and offensive intentions. NATO enlargement phases are studied alongside the Russian reaction to them, and the reasons for Russian aggressive balancing action, as well as Russian muted reactions, are explored. The next two chapters, on Ukraine and Georgia combined, help settle the theoretical questions of whether Russia is a reactive and status-quo power, and what leads to the triggering of Russian military actions. The Ukraine chapter highlights the primary drivers of Russian actions, and the structural aspects of Russian reaction, like Russian naval bases, as well as control over the material and industrial centers crucial to the continuation of the supply chains for the Russian military, and in turn, the continuation of Russian position and status of a great power in the balance of Eastern Europe. The chapter on Georgia explores the questions about Russian capability and intention in the broader balance of power with detailed discussion about Russian preparation for the war, as well as neutralizing and punitive operational procedures, force structures.

It is important to note at this juncture that while there are three case studies employed to explore and understand one overarching theoretical question, the cases are, by definition, different from each other. But all of them explore Russian balancing against perceived threats. NATO is an alliance, and Russian reaction is measured against phases of NATO enlargement. The

chapter on Ukraine gives us an understanding of what variables were lacking during the Orange Revolution, which led to a relatively muted Russian reaction, compared to a proxy war after the Euromaidan. The chapter on Georgia examines a single case in depth and sheds light on the question of Russia being an expansionist power or a status-quo power. All three chapters in turn, combined, and only combined, give an answer to the central research question, of what theoretical explanation can be satisfactorily attributed to Russian military actions and foreign policy, and whether Russia can be considered a realist power, acting according to the dictates of Balance of Threat theory. Social science is, of course, not like physics, and any attempt to replicate a scientific structure in a historical study attempting to explore and construct a narrative will fall short. While there is an attempt to at least give a structural semblance to the three cases, they are still different than one another, and have differences in their structure within. This is, after all, theoretical, and the theoretical answers are tied up at the end. While individually each case study can form a separate academic paper, that is not the intention here, and this book is structured holistically.

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The final chapter, accordingly, summarizes the three empirical chapters on NATO, Ukraine, and Georgia; outlines the findings in light of the war in Ukraine; and explains why the study somewhat broadly predicted the war. It then ties them up in light of the Balance of Threat theory and explains the basic theoretical findings as a whole, connecting them to the primary hypotheses outlined earlier. It explains why Russia broadly acts according to the dictates of balance of threat, why Russian aggressive actions, and even more importantly Russian muted reactions, can be explained by the presence and absence of the causal variables, and that in turn explain if Russian foreign policy is broadly realist. The book explains that if Russia balances against threats, it acts as a security maximizer, determined to uphold what it considers a status quo. It also sheds some light on the broad auxiliary theoretical questions, whether Russia is, indeed, a defensive realist power, or an offensive realist power, and whether Russia has expansionist aim, will, or capability. Finally, it clarifies why Russia is a defensive realist power, which acts per the assumptions of the Balance of Threat theory and ends with providing some brief policy prescriptions and suggestions.

There have been multiple academic and policy analyses about post-soviet Russia from domestic and ideological foundations of Russian foreign policy.[18] A significant number of them focus on Vladimir Putin's "regime," or "reign," and how that shapes Russian foreign policy. Others focus on the ideological aspects—for example, how "honor" or "identity" influences Russian foreign policy, or how Moscow is simply "imperial" in nature, and Russian actions are predicated on territorial expansionism.[19] There are only a few works of academic scholarship, mostly research papers, which have

studied Russian grand strategy.[20] Many of them focus on individual cases or events. Yet more such research simply focuses on the unit-level tactical and military dimensions, such as analyses of the Russian energy sector, or force structure and operational details.[21]

What has not been done in research or scholarship is an attempt to explore two broad theoretical questions: First, what variables explain the differences *within* Russian behavior, often in similar situations, and second, what does that lead to regarding the characterization of Russia as a great power? The central research question is therefore as follows: Can neorealism as a systemic theory adequately explain post-soviet Russian balancing behavior and military actions in Europe? To date, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been a systemic study of post-soviet Russian foreign policy using a single theoretical lens.

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The absence of such a book-length theoretical analysis of post-soviet Russian foreign policy and balancing behavior is thus a significant gap in the academic literature. Is there a theoretical framework that explains, if not fully, at least satisfactorily the causes of the Russian use of military force in specific cases, as well as the causes of Russian calm and rapprochement in similar instances? To what extent can one theory—in this case, a neorealist theory—explain that difference in behavioral patterns? And if that is indeed done, can Russia be defined as a realist great power? These are some of the theoretical questions this book explores and addresses.

WHY THEORY?

A recent observable trend in scholarly literature argues that "theory" is a simplistic way to understand reality.[22] The world is, of course, enormously complex for one single theory to have complete explanatory power. But as Kenneth Waltz suggested, for that very reason, the purpose of a theory is to simplify reality, facilitate a discussion, and most importantly, formulate a way forward. Waltz wrote, "A theory arranges phenomena so that they are seen as mutually dependent; it connects otherwise disparate facts; it shows how changes in some of the phenomena necessarily entail changes in others. To form a theory requires envisioning a pattern where none is visible to the naked eye."[23] "Data never speak for themselves," Waltz added. "Observation and experience never lead directly to knowledge of causes."[24] The world might very well be enormously complex, with unit-level differences, and there are in-depth area studies to focus on that, but theories help to see emerging patterns—patterns that, in turn, are used for categories, which then help formulate policy. At the risk of sounding like Henry Kissinger, it is not a perfect

system, but it is better than an enormous amount of information, data, and knowledge with zero wisdom and complete policy paralysis.[25]

In light of that, Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory is used as a framework. Walt argued that a theory is important as much as providing a causal connection, as well as explaining the said connection, and theories are, therefore, expected to provide patterns in perplexing phenomena.[26] This book attempts to understand Russia from a theoretical perspective, with the hope that it helps in formulating policy in the future.

One will also observe a visible similarity of structure and template to Walt's book, *The Origins of Alliances*.[27] The similarity is deliberate. This is a theory-testing exercise. It was therefore prudent to use the same template and design of the original theory, for hypothesis testing, using the same theoretical framework.

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The importance of this subject is manifest. Since 2007, there has been one state-versus-state war in Europe involving Russia, and one ongoing proxy war, and an annexation of an entire region. There have also been multiple cyberattacks, assassinations, chemical poisoning, commercial jet downing incidents, and other domestic interference. All these scenarios trace their roots to Moscow. While not a superpower, Russia is the world's eleventh-largest economy, the sixth-largest by purchasing power parity, the second-most-powerful state in nuclear arsenals, with newly modernized military doctrines, and with growing capabilities in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence domains.

Added to that, since 2016, the balance of power in the European continent appears to be shifting with the rise of populist movements. The United States is showing signs of retrenchment, as the preponderant security guarantor of EU and NATO, demonstrating a desire to pivot to Asia. This war might as well be the last gasp of American Atlanticists. American, European, and British policy toward Russia alternates between a desire for complete détente and rapprochement, and a return to adversarial ideological competition. A better understanding of the causation behind Russian military actions therefore provides some clarity in understanding the character of a great power on the periphery of a continent that has historically been antagonistic. It is imperative as a scholarly endeavor, and it fills a gap in the literature and is enormously topical and policy relevant.

In order to do that, I define some key terms and concepts that are used throughout the book, and I summarize the project with a guideline to subsequent chapters.

Definitions and Conceptualization

Perhaps one of the most important parts of any book is to outline the definitions, concepts, and limitations therein. Accordingly, for the purpose of this book, a few key concepts and terms are hereby defined.

First, *the West*, the *EU*, the *United States*, and *NATO* are often used interchangeably as a nominal concept. Of this, the concept of the West is arguably the most problematic. The "West" is, of course, not a defined territory, but during the Cold War, it was considered to be the countries formally under NATO, or NATO allies such as Australia and New Zealand. The concept has been significantly diluted lately, given Turkey's recent authoritarian turn, as well as NATO's enlargement since the mid-1990s. For example, under no measurable metrics can Turkey be still considered more "Western" than even Russia.[28] Putting aside Turkey, even former Warsaw Pact countries like Hungary and Poland have shown recent signs of changes in domestic politics that are significantly different normatively than the Western European and Scandinavian nation states. One can also argue the West was never normatively "liberal democratic," but rather a territorial entity, and the current government of Hungary and Poland falls squarely within that tradition, given that NATO included dictatorial Spain during the Cold War. But Australia and New Zealand are (and were) also considered Western nations, and they are as far away from the geographic West as possible.

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That being said, two factors assist in clearing up this conundrum. First, "the West" is still used to understand any country under NATO, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Broadly, the Anglosphere, and European nation states, that are either formally under NATO and the European Union or, to use Karl Deutsch's terminology, under one "security architecture," are collectively called "the West," in regular conversation, in the media, and in scholarly literature.[29] Almost any newspaper, for example, would mention "the West" as a phrase and use it interchangeably with "NATO" or "the EU."[30] Likewise, to give an example of the latest in academic literature, historian Timothy Snyder consistently used the terms *West* and *Western* to denote both the United States and the European Union.[31] Finally, the Russian point of view is far more important than the conceptual debates one can see within "the West," and, as observed in later chapters, for the Russian political and military elite, there is no discernible difference between the *EU*, *NATO*, the *United States*, and *the West*.

Second, for the purpose of this book, although the phrase *NATO enlargement* is mostly used, there is no difference between the phrases *NATO enlargement* and *NATO expansion*. The question of NATO, which will be studied in detail later, is still one of intense scholarly debate. There is still scholarly dispute on whether there was any verbal guarantee or

no-enlargement pledge from NATO to the Soviet Union. Scholarly opinion suggests that there was.[32] However, terminology-wise, this book mostly uses the term *enlargement* rather than *expansion*, as NATO did not proceed to conquer the new territories, or annex them by force; the "enlargement" was mutual and consensual. That said, as we mentioned concerning *the West*, the terms *enlargement* and *expansion* are used interchangeably in security studies academic literature.[33] And as with the previous point, from the Russian point of view, there was (and is) no difference. As discussed in detail in the chapter on NATO, from the Western point of view, NATO enlargement was not just strategic, but also institutional and normative, not just meant as a strategic buffer, but to institutionalize liberal democratic peace.[34] From the vantage point of Moscow, it was simply territorial encroachment of a hostile political and military alliance, moving closer and closer to the Russian borders. Given that we are trying to understand and explore the causes of Russian "reaction," that distinction—or lack thereof—should be kept in mind.

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Third, *Russia*, in this context, means the Russian ruling elite. There is a rich history in qualitative theoretical analysis of great power behavior of essentially using the name of the state or capital to refer to what usually amounts to the ruling elite or policymakers.[35] This book carries on that tradition. It is, of course, difficult to "process trace" Russian elite decision-making. There are some examples of recent scholarship that use backroom channels, administrative leaks, and even gossips to construct a narrative. Those are good as pop history, but they may invite questions about the validity of academic research, especially in the field of "security studies." There are other forms of scholarship conducting historical analysis over a long period of time that use primary sources, long-form interviews, and archival material. This book uses secondary literature and inferences from observed Russian behavior and military movements, and then tallies it with relevant Russian rhetoric, from the political and military elites, to test the hypotheses. And as observed in later chapters, Russian decision-making is usually hierarchical and contingent on a section of the political and military elite who have remarkably similar thought process and threat perceptions. There are opposition parties and fringe groups, but they do not carry much weight, nor does public opinion have any observed sway in matters of war and peace. For the purpose of this book, therefore, the standard "security studies" template in which the terms *Russia* and *Moscow* are used to refer to the Russian ruling elite and state.[36]

Fourth, the ultimate aim of the book is to explore a simple assertion: Is Russia a realist great power? But to achieve that, one needs to first explain a set of complications. *Realism* is a very broad theoretical paradigm. Realism as an international relations discipline traces its roots to realism in philosophy, which in turn goes back to the times of Thucydides. Realism in international relations is both a theoretical framework and a research design. To

take the example of a Russian *matryoshka* doll, realism as a philosophy can be divided between classical realism and neorealism, and neorealism in turn is divided between offensive and defensive realism. Defensive realism has several different explanatory theories, such as the offense-defense balance theory, the security dilemma theory, and the Balance of Threat theory, which attempts to explain specific foreign-policy behavior. Of that, one specific realist theory of foreign policy, Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory, is used to explore and test various hypotheses, the idea being that if the majority of Russian actions match the hypotheses, it can be argued that Russia acts within the dictates of neorealism, and within the broader confines of realism as a theoretical framework. By that logic, Russia could then be termed a *realist great power*.

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This book does not naturally claim to answer all theoretical questions. The intention was to provide a theoretical understanding of Russian foreign policy, with multiple cases, over a given period of time, and under different Russian regimes and leadership. At the time of writing, there are two conflicts in which Russia is currently involved—Syria and Ukraine. With the United States reneging on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and possibly the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty as well, there are protests going on in Moscow, and NATO is increasing funding under constant pressure from Washington, DC.

As Walt himself wrote in the opening of *The Origins of Alliances*, I am also primarily relying on secondary sources and research papers, instead of primary sources, in investigating a theory rather than building one, and the assessment is based on the scholarship provided by the area specialists and military theorists. Within the time frame and limitations of durability, funding, and primary-source research, this tests a theory to see if Russia can be termed a realist power, which in turn will help Western policymakers to decide and debate on a future grand-strategy moving forward.

To sum it all up, this book attempts to explain Russian post-soviet foreign policy, balancing behavior, and military use of force in Europe, in light of Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory. To address the overarching research puzzle of whether Russia acts per the dictates of Balance of Threat, and therefore broadly as a security maximiser and defensive realist power, this book endeavors to assess Russia's foreign policy and military ambition. The book also debates some broad and topical theoretical questions, on whether Russia is a revanchist and expansionist power, and a power maximiser, or a defensive realist power and a security maximiser. The book employs a qualitative mixed-methods research design, focusing on secondary military sources. The evidence is primarily determined from Russian strategic actions,

and not Russian governmental rhetoric, as discussed in detail in the following chapters.

The findings have significant policy relevance. If Russia simply balances against threats and only uses military force in areas where it already has entrenched material and military interests, it becomes easier for policymakers to somewhat calculate where Moscow will be determined to defend its interests compared to regions where Moscow will only be rhetorically aggressive. The findings also shed light on broad theoretical questions and suggest that Russia is a security maximiser as opposed to a power maximiser. That, in turn, logically entails that Russia is a defensive realist power and not an offensive realist power. It is difficult to coexist with an imperial expansionist. It is, however, possible to maintain a negative peace with a power that is determined to uphold the status quo, but that lacks further hegemonic ambitions, will, or capability. According to the theory, post-soviet Russia should indulge in aggression only when it perceives its direct interests to be threatened and revert back to the status quo the moment the threats subside or are neutralized by balancing actions. To test that, in itself, is a contribution to the broader literature.

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NOTES

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Chapter 1

Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy

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To understand whether Russia is a realist great power, and whether Moscow acts within the broad dictates of realism, this book, as elaborated earlier, explores Russian balancing in Europe, especially in reaction to NATO enlargement, and the Russian use of force in its near abroad. This chapter explores some recent relevant literature that attempts to provide a causal explanation of Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy has undergone several major changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union, often overlapping. Scholars differed on the direction of Russian foreign policy, with optimism among certain sections about trade and cooperation between Russia and the West, as well as voices of concern that a great power rivalry will be back.[1] The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in a relative lack of coherent strategy and objective, and an ideological vacuum.[2] These, in turn, resulted in internal crises, power struggles, economic downfall, and diverging elite identities that hindered Russia from developing a coherent foreign-policy objective.[3] Russia, however, has since then reemerged as one of the major geopolitical players.[4]

While there were broad changes, there has also been a distinct continuity. The notable and reflexive anti-Western rhetoric that characterized Russian foreign policy for the most part also had elements of pragmatism. It included an acknowledgment of American military hegemony and American-led Western liberal international order.[5] There has also been notable similarity regardless of administration, especially when it comes to Russia's near abroad, and areas Russia considered to be in its sphere of influence. Russia has often resorted to active diplomacy upholding the status quo in its privileged sphere, and it has resorted to military force twice in the last decade. Russian actions and displeasure with the West during the Balkan conflicts, Russian aggressive behavior in the Baltics, and outright hostility in Georgia and Ukraine points to a new resurgent Russia where Russia is not shy to use military force to assert geopolitical goals in the region it considers its "privileged interest."[6]

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On closer observation, patterns emerge in phases of Russian foreign policy. In this chapter, Russian foreign policy since the Soviet collapse is divided into four phases. Broadly, each short phase of cooperation and rapprochement is followed by a longer phase of disillusionment and pragmatic balancing behavior. The first phase runs in the early few years of Boris Yeltsin's foreign policy, with Russia being pro-Western in both international politics and economic orientation. The second phase follows that, when under the premiership of Yevgeny Primakov, when Russia faced with stalled economic reforms and structural difference with the West, looked for pragmatic multipolarity. The third phase started with Putin's first term and steady rapprochement with NATO and the United States over the War on Terror and the Afghanistan campaign. The fourth phase starts around 2003 and continues to this day, barring minor rapprochement and reset in between, where Russia returned to its traditional great power role and balancing, with assertive foreign policy and willingness to use force in its spheres of influence.

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The literature is also segmented in explaining these broad trends, as noted in the subsequent sections. The liberal theories and analysis broadly focus on Russian behavior predicated upon domestic regime stability and economic considerations, trade, and Atlanticist policies abroad, and attributes it to broadly lobby groups, energy sectors, and perceived threats felt by the Russian regime by color revolutions in the near abroad.[7] No foreign-policy analysis is, of course, monocausal, and naturally any liberal explanation of Russian foreign policy often attributes Russian behavior to a combination of causes; nevertheless they are divided on their causal variables, which broadly fall under traditional liberal theories of foreign policy. The second line of analysis is a newer constructivist one, which focuses on the Russian sense of honor, and identity.[8] This line of argument attributes to Russian elites having a sense of aspirational identity of a great power, determined to maintain Moscow's status, honor, and privileged position in the European balance. An attempt is made hereinafter to chart the arc of Russian foreign policy in the four above-mentioned phases, followed by an explanation by these theoretical schools, and provide a short critique.

FIRST PHASE: PRO-WESTERN ORIENTATION

The first phase of Russian foreign policy immediately after the Soviet collapse was one where Russia was oriented toward the West—more precisely, toward a Western-modeled democratic liberal society. Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first elected president, stated in 1991 that the country would turn "to the world community with pure intentions in order to win friends but not enemies, and to establish honest and civilized relations with other

states."[9] During the early years of this new relationship, it appeared that the West and Russia could become strong partners.[10] Overall relations with the West, especially the EU, and Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin was enthusiastic.[11] Yeltsin stated, as late as 1997, that Russia was working toward the recognition of being a full European state, and in due course of time, to join the European Union.[12]

This initial phase lasted until 1995–1996, although there were slow changes that started from 1994 onward.[13] The objective of Russian foreign policy in the first few years under Yeltsin can be summed up as consisting of "democratic peace" abroad, economic investment and support from the West, and being recognized as a respectable, law-abiding member of the international community.[14]

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Yeltsin's early foreign policy was formulated by Andrei Kozyrev, and it broadly focused on the liberal ideas of democratic peace, the promotion of human rights, and the liberalization of an economy from central command.[15] Kozyrev and Yeltsin, and a section of the Russian ruling elite, were of the opinion that it would be in Russia's national interest to gain membership in the club of developed democratic states and their economic institutions, thus assuming the "fitting place that has been predetermined for us by history and geography."[16] Economic 'shock therapy' sought to integrate Russia within the most important "transatlantic economic and security institutions" such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), NATO, and the Group of 7 (G7) while limiting Russia's economic ties with its former territories in Eurasia, as it was considered necessary to combat stagnation. As both Checkel and Donaldson mention, the primary goals of what came to be known as an Atlanticist, liberal foreign policy, were global economic integration, nuclear and environmental security, Westernization and Europeanisation, and market reforms.[17]

Even when Kozyrev's foreign-policy outlook was liberal, it was not strictly internationalist in the Soviet sense.[18] Kozyrev argued that the basis for the new foreign policy would be Russia's national interests as compared to the theoretical, more universalist, international class struggle that formed the nominal principle of the Soviet foreign policy.[1920] Kozyrev argued that good relations with the West were necessary because "no developed, democratic, civil society . . . can threaten us," which scholars maintain was a Russian version of the Liberal Democratic Peace Theory.[21] Liberal scholars maintain that domestic consideration was more important in this phase, as Russian policymakers realized that with Western help in gaining entry to international economic institutions, a sound economy and subsequently a sound civil society would be formed.[22] The entire Russian administration was therefore focused mostly on domestic development and restructuring.[23] Added to that were structural reasons, like sudden and relative inferiority in military

strength, size, and economy, and all these factors combined to shape the early post-soviet Russian foreign policy.[24]

There is broad scholarly consensus about this direction of Russian foreign policy from the immediate post-soviet collapse and during the early Yeltsin years[25] in the sense that this first phase of Russian foreign policy was relatively straightforward and pro-Western, without major deviations and shifts; there are differing theoretical analysis as to why.[26] Liberal scholarly opinion and interpretation of this period claims that the rapid economic decline and the relative weakness produced an urgent need for the Russian administration to give a direction to its foreign policy. Regime stability, as well as democratic peace, seems to be the key driver behind the liberal push under Yeltsin and Kozyrev.[27] McFaul, for example, points out the centrality of Russian domestic politics during this period, influencing the articulation and implementation of Russian foreign policy. McFaul argues that groups with economic interests, like Gazprom, started to push away the traditional Russian state, resulting in a peaceful direction of foreign policy.[28]

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Even with differing expectations and ideas about Russia's global role among the ruling elites, there were basic agreements regarding objectives. Those objectives were the revival of the economy to avoid further disintegration of the country and to stabilize the regime, economic and social revival with the help of financial aid from the West, to maintain parity in the nuclear forces with the West. Boris Yeltsin, consequently, followed this foreign policy of peaceful accommodation with the West, and Russian diplomacy aimed at promoting Russian integration in mainstream, Western institutions, and securing Western help for internal transformation and the stabilization of Russia's economy and domestic polity. Russia's foreign policymakers were prepared to accommodate Western interests on a whole range of issues, including nuclear cooperation and privatization.[29]

While liberal analysis of this period is relatively straightforward, constructivist arguments are broader, and they are not very useful in explaining specific actions in time periods of Russian history, but rather, constructivist analysts try to explain the broad arc of Russian foreign policy and what shaped it. Constructivist theorists argue that Soviet disintegration altered Russian identity and therefore altered Russian national interests. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the official Marxist-Leninist state ideology left a conceptual vacuum, which also affected the Russian identity.[30] The policy paralysis during Yeltsin's early days was attributed to these debates within Russia regarding Russian identity.[31] The fundamental argument of all constructivists is that Russia as a nation state suffered from an identity crisis, often oscillating between identifying as a European great power or a unique land power between Europe and Asia, echoing the nineteenth-century debates of Slavophiles and Westernizers.[32]

However, a strong sense of Russia being a unique civilization remained. A significant majority of Russian elites believed that Russia is a unique civilization, a Russian version of exceptionalism, and a bridge between the European and Asia landmass with a unique burden in history.[33] Clunan argues, "despite the rejection of the ideologically driven past, elites shared common memories of Russia's past as a distinct civilization that not only was premised on ideology but also arose out of Russia's history as a multicultural authoritarian empire as well as Russia's cultural traditions," adding that "the collapse of the Soviet Union left Russian political elites with a shared aspiration to restore Russia's status as a great power on a par with the leading countries in the West."[34] To explain the periodic pro-Western behavior of Russia, Tsygankov also defined the Russian concept of honor as a key variable in Russian foreign policy.[35] Tsygankov claims that Russian elites consider being part of the West in virtuous joint projects as honorable, but since Russian cultural lenses vary, and Russia is more conservative as a society, it ended up sometimes feeling isolated from the West. Tsygankov defines two very different and opposed course of actions that Russian rulers have historically undertaken. Historically Russia sought to be either like the West and win its recognition or to beat the West in their power game. Therefore, Europe's recognition of Russia has also been as equally problematic as Europe's rejection of Russia, as Russian identity is reflected on Europe. The Russian honor has naturally two dimensions; European and local. Russia only acts on the European-ness, when the West does not challenge the distinctive aspects of Russian honor. Similarly, when Russian distinct honor is challenged by the West, Russia tends to act defensively. An example of this "distinct sense of honor" is Russian traditional Eastern Orthodox and Slavic ties with Serbia and other Slavic allies and instinctive defense of such areas that Russia considers her traditional sphere of influence. What Moscow views as honorable objectives, the West often views as revisionist behavior.

This identity crisis reflects the Russian foreign policy establishment "mindset" with simultaneous attraction and repulsion regarding Europe, where Europe is to be revered and pitied and feared and emulated all at the same time.[36] Tsygankov and Lo both state this is a key factor in determining Russian behavior, where the variable is how Russia views itself alongside the West. An instance of technological advancement, or a great power's show of force, results in an elite aspiration in Russia to follow, in what Tsygankov considers an honorable cooperation. All the other times, honor is used defensively. This has been a key component deciding Russian behavior during NATO expansions, wherein Russia cannot overlook the fact that the Eastern European states demonstrated an interest to move westward.[37] Russian policymakers during the early 1990s started identifying themselves with the European nations again, as they regarded the Soviet times as an aberration

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from Russia's European past. The 'Westernization' of foreign policy was rhetorically justified during the early days of Yeltsin on the ground of Russia's lost Western identity, which had been oppressed by Bolshevism and the Soviet experience.[38]

This first phase of Russian foreign policy immediately after the Soviet collapse is relatively straightforward, when explained through the lens of liberal international-relations theories. It logically makes more sense that the Russian elite viewed Moscow's diminished status alongside still-chaotic and turbulent domestic politics, and they focused on regime stability within her borders, and a peaceful foreign policy abroad in relation with other powers, often at the cost of subservience to economic institutions. It is difficult to argue the same with constructivism in this phase, and it cannot explain short phases of Russian behavior, especially where Russian actions and deviations can provide successful causal logic. None of the constructivist authors explain and define clearly what "unique Russian honor" is, and more importantly, how honor is measured and quantified, and what variables influence the difference of behavior in the same phase. For example, Clunan cites polls about Russian elites aspiring to a great power status, and argues that all subgroups of Russian elites aspired for regional hegemony. That, however, fails to explain subsequently the differences between Russian Atlanticists and nationalists or foreign-policy pragmatists. Clunan notes that "data suggests that shared memories of the Russian and Soviet past produced common aspirations with regard to Russia's international status, but not regarding its future political purpose."[39] She adds that Russian elites were united in their opinion that Moscow "is to unite the best of both civilizations, thereby ameliorating the inevitable conflict between them. In another version, Russia's geographic destiny is to be the integrator of the Slavic or Turkic or Mongol peoples, as it is the natural hegemon and patron of the Eurasian continent."[40] Her argument, however, fails to explain the difference in Russian Atlanticist orientation from 1991 to 1993, and Moscow's more pragmatist balancing during the latter years of Yeltsin's presidency. Likewise, Tsygankov's qualifiers remain vague throughout, and as will be further illustrated later, often even contradictory. He fails to mention why Russia would consider defending Slavic countries as honorable, while not explaining the numerous times when Russia actively failed or looked away without defending the honor of a fellow Slavic country. The notion of honor sometimes borders on civilizational exceptionalism and is non-quantifiable. Constructivist analyses of Russian foreign policy in this period, therefore, are holistic, and overarching, and fail to consider, for example, Russia's hard bargaining with IMF and the West even during the most pro-Western phase of Yeltsin's early years, and their negotiations with Ukraine and the West on the issue of nuclear weapons. Forces of economics were also neglected in this line of analysis.

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SECOND PHASE: SEEKING PRAGMATIC MULTIPOLARITY

The early phase of Atlanticism faced sporadic difficulties domestically, and was never very popular among Russian hardliners, culminating in the 1993 constitutional crisis.[41] The pro-Western tilt subsided with the nomination of Yevgeni Primakov in 1996 as the foreign minister of Russia.[42] Primakov solidified a strategic shift in Russian foreign policy that was already increasingly becoming evident, as Russian-Western relations suffered from major differences over Russian hardline actions in Chechnya since 1995.[43] This phase, under the stewardship of Primakov, saw Russia's return toward a more "pragmatic" foreign policy and a shift from Westernization toward a more multipolar realpolitik.[44] Russia's domestic politics at this stage were again nationally charged with anti-Western rhetoric.[45] Russia in this phase continued to seek trade partners like India and China while simultaneously courting Western investment, opposing Western interventions in the Balkans, as well as fending off Western criticism over Russia's first Chechen War. Simultaneously, Russia also continued to cooperate in nuclear proliferation issues, and it partnered with NATO, while vocally opposing what it perceived as NATO's gradual eastward encroachment.

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Liberal theorists argue that economic necessities and regime stability were the primary variables deciding Russian foreign policy at this stage. In simpler terms, Russia was suffering from a combination of factors, such as extreme domestic instability due to the failure of economic shock therapy, as well as the Chechen crisis and rising intolerance. Added to that was what it perceived as Western encroachment. Russia, however, needed the West as well, most importantly Western investment to keep the government and economy stable so the Russian government could also stay stable. Kubicek, Hopf, and Lynch argue that Primakov's pragmatism was essentially opportunistic maneuvering, as Primakov had to resort to nationalistic rhetoric because the Russian population was dissatisfied with the pace of economic reforms, as well as a perceived highhandedness of the West.[46] They argue that simultaneously Russian business lobbies as well as Russian policymakers needed the West, which compelled Russia to be more pragmatic.[47] The stark realities of economic transition resulted in domestic disorder, corruption, and poverty, and this was exacerbated by the 1998 financial crisis, therefore proving to be an obstruction for Russian westward Atlanticism, while it simultaneously kept Russian ambitious foreign policy grounded.[48] The Russian economic situation negated the earlier pro-Western pro-liberal ideas within the country, as Russians were dissatisfied with the slow, stalled reforms, and that in turn pressured Russian policymakers to be at least rhetorically opposed to the

West, while simultaneously searching for other regional trade partners and markets. Russian expectations concerning Western assistance were not and could not be met, and the euphoria regarding rapid change to market economy and liberalism also subsided. Primakov's strategy was intended to create a traditional multipolar environment; however, it was hindered repeatedly due to domestic disorder and financial instability.[49] Therefore, despite a change from pro-Western to sharp anti-Western rhetoric, Russian foreign policy options were constrained. While Russia continued to aspire to be a regional hegemon in its former Soviet space, it was compelled to acknowledge American and European geopolitical dominance.

This division within Russian elites regarding the West is explained by McFaul as he divided this period between pro-Western pragmatists and anti-Western pragmatists.[50] The previous elite consisted of groups with economic interests and lobby groups, including Gazprom, oil companies, mineral exporters, and the bankers, influencing policy outcomes that resulted in somewhat asymmetric engagement in foreign policy. Russian business lobby groups and oligarchs were the pro-Western pragmatists who had had a limited set of interests including keeping Western funds channels open and not so much interest in other foreign-policy aspects, like NATO expansion and Balkan conflicts. The anti-Western pragmatists, like Russian military-industrial and security elite, on the other hand desired equal treatment from the West and alternative funding sources to balance the West. The anti-Western pragmatists depended on reflexive anti-Western sentiment to maintain their position, funding, and legitimacy in either bureaucracy or politics. McFaul explains that Russian foreign policy therefore suffered from instances of strain and inconsistency.

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The constructivist argument of this period focused on the continuing crisis in Russian identity and the defense of Russia's honor. Tsygankov claimed (without clarification) that Primakov's version of a foreign-policy objective fits the "defensive honor" vision.[51] The policy goals of Russia at this stage were shaped by Russia's relative decline, and a desire to revive the capabilities and prestige of a great power. Primakov realized that with actual diminished capabilities, the only way to maintain honor is to portray a stiff opposition to the West and NATO expansion. In relation to the West, Primakov insisted that Russia needed to "prove" her strength by balancing against the stronger power, in this case, the United States. In the context of growing security threats in Chechnya, a portrayal of strength was also needed to show Russia as a great power to both domestic and international adversaries. It is important to note here that Tsygankov mentions honor as a cause that determined Russian actions, but in his examples, he has used the logic of balancing against a stronger adversary to project strength, which falls essentially under neorealist theory. Tsygankov quotes Primakov as saying that NATO

enlargement affects Russia "psychologically," and therefore a pragmatic foreign policy would ensure a Russia-China-India multipolar arrangement, to somewhat balance the overwhelming power of the United States. Like most constructivist theories, the analysis heavily relies on political rhetoric emanating from Moscow—in this instance, one particular politician, Yevgeni Primakov.[52]

Other constructivist arguments of this period also are broadly theoretical about the nature of the Russian state, without explaining how they define or explain Russian foreign policy. For example, Lo argued, as Piontkovsky and Hopf before him, that Russian behavior was essentially caused by an identity crisis, where Russia's perception of the West is a declining civilizational entity, which needs to be engaged and feared at the same time, and it is guided by a Russian crisis of identity (European/Eurasian) and insecurity (economic/socio-cultural).[53] Prizel argued that the Russian national identity always reflected a nation's identity in contrast with "the other," that is Europe and the West, therefore Russia instinctively opposed Western dictates.[54] Russia, of course, does not, as that is evident from the various cooperative partnerships even during the most trying of times between Russia and the West, which points out that there are some other incentives at play.

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The constructivist analysis of Yeltsin's period, both in the first phase and in the second, raises valuable points in understanding the nature and character of the Russian state and the influences on Russian elites; it also suffers from limitations, as arguments fail to provide a direct link between an idea and measurable foreign policy output. While these are all valid observations about the Russian identity crisis during the 1990s, none of them give us any testable measure for Russian behavior. Tsygankov mentions that Primakov understood Russian domestic conditions are dismal due to the Chechen crisis, and he needs a strong stabilization, but it is not clear how that could not be explained by more liberal regime stability argument. Tsygankov argues that real income at this stage fell drastically and therefore forced Primakov's pragmatism. Put simply, even when Primakov wanted to balance the West by looking for partners in India and China, Russia could not afford to antagonize the West as Primakov needed IMF assistance. While this is a logical explanation of Russian behavior, it is hardly a constructivist argument. Heller, Prizel, and Piontkovsky, while providing an understanding of factors that might or might not cause Russian behavioral changes, never provide a way to measure ideational factors like historical experience and perception and how much in reality they shape Russian foreign policy. The liberal analysis of Yeltsin's presidency is comparatively straightforward and is better at explaining the pro-Western orientation of Russia immediately after the Soviet collapse, as well as the disillusionment of Russia with the West after failed economic policies.[55]

If one compares the constructivist and the liberal arguments of this period, the liberal argument is more logical and could be used to determine the causes of Russian behaviors. For example, constructivist logic of the identity crisis between Eurasians and pro-Western Atlanticists is flimsy compared to the liberal argument that the Russian economic crash during August 1998, and the subsequent Kosovo crisis, severely diminished the influence of the pro-Western liberals in Russian policymaking circles. The majority of constructivist arguments are predicated on rhetoric emanating from the political class, but they fail to account for causal behavior. Arguments like Primakov desiring a multipolar world with China and India to balance against NATO enlargement are logical, but they do not make it conservative. Liberal theories, on the other hand, appear more logical on why Russia might have looked for more multipolar alignments and diverse trade partnerships, and why Russia was more inclined to accept Western preponderance in European balance, given that domestic situation especially in the Caucasus was unstable.[56]

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The Kosovo crisis, in particular, illustrates a liberal causal explanation as to why the Russian foreign-policy establishment, regardless of ideology, goes rhetorically anti-Western to preserve domestic legitimacy while acting pragmatically in reality. As McFaul and other liberal theorists highlighted, Russian policymakers understood that Russia, collapsing under heavy economic stagnation, needed Western engagement, but anti-Western sentiment was high during the NATO bombing campaign. As McFaul demonstrates, Russian politicians carefully balanced their anti-Western rhetoric, while paying attention that the anti-Western sentiment on the streets of Russia never spilled out of control. It allowed Russia to carefully position itself as a staunchly anti-interventionist country, pro-peace and pro-international law.[57]

THIRD PHASE: RAPPROCHEMENT AND TACTICAL ALIGNMENT

The third phase of Russian foreign policy started around the time Putin ascended to Russian leadership at the turn of the millennium. Putin's rise gave new directions to Russian foreign policy, one of a great power rapprochement, with a shift in orientation and objective.[58] Putin aspired to be a partner or even a member of NATO and cement his partnership with the United States.[59] The primacy of the United States was implicitly recognized, and Putin was the first leader to call the United States after the September 11 attacks; initially, he also did not respond to the United States unilaterally withdrawing from the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty, which maintained strategic stability in Europe since the Cold War. Russian and US cooperation during the campaign in Afghanistan included sharing intelligence and allowing a US military

presence in Central Asia and flight over Russian airspace. While there were alternative routes the United States could have taken in case of Russian reluctance, this cooperation highlighted a turn toward a tactical alignment of sorts during the early days of the War on Terror.

Liberal analysis of Russia's actions under Putin during this phase is more consistent with the idea that internal factors and regime stability shaped Russian policy abroad and focused on the domestic, institutional, and economic factors that influenced Putin's policy. The distinct and marked transition of Russia from Yeltsin to Putin symbolized Russia's return to the ranks of the major powers and was starkly influenced by domestic-level variables and economic prosperity, which in turn led the Russian regime to be secured and have more leverage in dealing with Europe and the United States.[60]

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There are, of course, minor differences in what liberal analysts argue with regard to Putin and how Moscow dealt with foreign policy during the early Putin period. Compared to Kozyrev and Yeltsin's early era, when Russian foreign policy was influenced by a distinct democratic peace objective, the liberal analysis of Putin's early era suggests the primary objective of Russian government was and remained regime stability. The main factors that influenced Russian behavior were, therefore, economic leverage and domestic stability, and for that Russia wanted to have good relations and forge tactical alignments with the West. The Russian ruling political elite agreed on the essential argument that the Russian state needed to be strong and centralized to have a cohesive unified foreign-policy objective. The foreign-policy objective was to maintain Russian economic stability, use oil and gas as bargaining blocks in negotiation with Europe, try to find common ground with Washington, and use the rhetoric of the War on Terror to solidify Russian domestic stability and suppress dissent.[61] Russia was waging the second Chechen War, and it was imperative for Russia to align with the West. It was in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo bombing campaign, and Russia needed the West not to be overtly critical of its own Chechnya campaign. Russia was worried the West would give diplomatic and moral support to the rebel groups. Headley argues that from 1999 onward, Russian policymakers were talking about an "Islamist" arc of instability from Afghanistan to Turkey, while facing growing Islamist insurgency at home. Russian policymakers were baffled that the West was not seeing the infiltration of Chechen fighters by Al Qaeda. The American War on Terror immediately after the World Trade Center attacks provided impetus to the idea that Russia was a natural ally against global Islamism, and it helped Russia solidify its status as an important geopolitical actor, while stabilizing at home.[62] Russian cooperation with the United States was, from the Russian side, partly about gaining great power status, but it was mostly a tactical alignment, addressing Russia's own Chechnya crisis.[63] Russian cooperation during the Afghanistan invasion also proved

the Kremlin's willingness to act within the Western-led international system, while acknowledging US hegemony. Putin pragmatically hijacked the War on Terror to tackle and suppress the Chechnya insurgency and ratchet up domestic and international support against the Chechen militants. In the face of Russian domestic problems, regime stability, and the suppression of dissent were the primary goals. Sakwa summarized that a stable Russia, pursuing its national interest while aligning with the West, was the primary foreign-policy objective of Putin.[64]

Constructivists like Tsygankov argued that Russian great power confidence came back due to the quick recovery from the 1998 financial crash. The economic recovery that coincided with Putin's first term alleviated much of Russia's domestic woes and allowed Russia to chart a more assertive and coherent foreign policy, in a way that the Russian ruling elite found this domestic economic resurgence useful to install a sense of pride and honor and patriotism, which in turn led to an uptick of regime support and allowed Russia to act more aggressively.[65] In search of a national identity and purpose, Putin combined czarist and Soviet symbols, adopting the czarist double-headed eagle as the national symbol and the Soviet national anthem (with new lyrics) while giving increased support to the Russian Orthodox Church and promoting orthodox and conservative forces abroad.[66] Tsygankov argues that Putin's personal sense of honor was one of the Russian state as a great European and Christian power, able to defend against external adversaries and threats. Putin, therefore, sought to join the West in "honorable" joint projects such as "fighting the global war on terror."[67]

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It is important to mention that while Tsygankov talked about how "cooperative honor" explained Putin's tactical alignment with the West against Islamism and the War on Terror, his examples could be attributed to traditional liberal analysis. For example, Tsygankov states that a "cooperative vision of honor" works when there is a recognition from the West, and Russian economic conditions made it attractive to foreign investors, which in turn helped in the Kremlin's desire to integrate with the West further.[68] Tsygankov also mentions quite correctly, in the later part of his analysis, that Russian assertiveness and antagonism toward the West increased after the color revolutions, which started around 2004–2005, but failed to mention why Russian behavior changed as Russian economic conditions did not change much and Russia was still an economically attractive destination for the West. Cooperation over terrorism and central Asia also continued even after the Iraq war fallout, and Russian-Western relations, despite all the bombastic rhetoric, were broadly cooperative till 2008. The argument that Putin steered the course of Russian policy simply based on arbitrary measures of Christian honor, without any rational geopolitical calculations, seems extremely far-fetched.

FOURTH PHASE: RETURN OF A GREAT POWER PREDATOR

The fourth phase of Russian foreign policy, which started around 2003–2004, saw Russian rapprochement and tactical alignment with the West come under strain. This period of 2003 onward saw a return of hard balancing and realpolitik in Russian foreign policy, which broadly continues to this day. Putin's second term, starting from 2004, saw even more international disagreements between Russia and the West.[69] During this phase, alongside the US unilateral invasion of Iraq, the perceived Western encroachment in Eastern Europe, due to the potential for NATO to expand membership in post-Soviet space in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as the color revolutions, added to Russian threat perceptions and exacerbated the traditional conflicts of interest.[70] Broadly, this period marks the return of the Russian use of traditional hard power, more assertive foreign policy in its former spheres of influence, and a constant balancing tendency, especially with the United States. Russia, alongside Germany and France, opposed American intervention and was vocal about NATO expansions. Color revolutions in former Soviet states like Georgia and Ukraine further strained the relations between the West and Russia, as Russia perceived them to be both a geopolitical threat as well as a threat to domestic regime stability. This great power resurgence reached a culmination point from the Munich Conference 2007, and subsequently with the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, which highlighted that Russia was willing to actively use its military power when it came to what it considered its core area of interest.[71] Russian intervention in Georgia also further sent a signal of deterrence to the EU and NATO from pursuing expansion further eastward, and it marked a significant strategic shift in Russian foreign policy marking military hegemonic intentions. Scholars highlighted this period as the start of a completely unilateral and self-interested action of Russian foreign policy, and some even highlighted it as the potential start of a 'New Cold War' between Russia and the West.[72]

Why did Russia start to turn away from the West? Scholars are divided on that. Stoner and McFaul claimed that Putin's shift toward anti-Americanism, anti-liberalism, radical nationalism, and an ever-more-aggressive foreign policy toward his neighbors is a direct consequence of Russian domestic political and economic developments.[73] They both argue that despite occasional belligerence, Russian relations with the West had been relatively calm, only hampered after the tumultuous elections of 2012, which turned Putin hostile to the idea of Western interference in Russian domestic politics. Leon Aron highlights that Putin enjoyed the first two terms with strong Russian economic growth, while in his third presidential term, the domestic economic

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growth, which Russia had enjoyed, stopped, even with oil prices at a historic high, and this might have influenced Putin to act more aggressively to divert domestic attention, in a continuation of the analysis that domestic politics primarily continued to shape Putin's foreign policy.[74] Rumer and Wallander argued that Russia maintains its aggressive diplomacy and energy sector as a leverage and maintains regime stability at home. Instead of military alliances, therefore, Russia seeks to diplomatically balance the United States, often playing Europe against the United States, as Russia remains relatively weak in institutions, with declining demographics and economic outlooks.[75] Trenin states that during the first few years of Putin, Russia wanted to be friendly to the West, but it was pushed around. The Putin administration came to the conclusion that the multipolar world idea of the 1990s is becoming a reality, and the relative decline of American power is a fact. Alongside, the Western model of democracy is no longer something to be imitated, and perceived Western interference and economic warfare in Russian domestic affairs resulted in Russia taking an antagonistic role. That coincided with Russian perception of Western interference in the color revolutions in Russia's near abroad. According to Trenin, Russian leaders therefore started to use Russian "patriotism" as a mobilizing factor.[76] Russian policymakers were opposed to these color revolutions as they viewed these events as foreign interference in a former Russian sphere of influence and consequently a threat to Russian regime stability. Liberal analysis provides evidence that to tackle and thwart this perceived threat, since 2006 onward, there has been a continuous political assault on the Western idea of democracy promotion and intervention alongside creating youth movements within Russia like the Nashi, as a counterweight to the various youth movements that were the driving forces behind the color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, while maintaining that the Western form of democracy is incompatible with Russia.[77]

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Domestic regime stability is also regarded as the key component by another slightly different take within the broader liberal analysis of Putin's foreign policy, which focuses on Putin as an individual and his "cronies," and claims that it is the economic/political/survivalist interests of these elite that is the chief determinant of Russian policy. Putin's Russia paid lip service to the Western institutions and order to maintain a strictly elite-driven authoritarian model within Russia. Shevtsova therefore predicates Russian foreign policy as a reactive idea to the threats to this model. Shevtsova's case study is Ukraine, where Russian elites led by Putin lead to a public mobilization against the threats to the motherland, and the "Putin Doctrine" legitimized a harsher rule at home and a more assertive stance abroad. Putin's foreign policy is therefore based on the stance that he is opposed to anything that threatens his rule, any real or perceived threats, like color revolutions in the near abroad, and any great-power aspirations or rhetoric are "just a way of

sustaining personalized power at a time when internal displays of might are no longer sufficient." Shevtsova argues that the Putin Doctrine is based on an imitation of the liberal order, and what she calls Russian interpretation of liberal institutions to prolong its life and power structure.[78] The Putin Doctrine, or Putinism, essentially calls on Putin and his allies and cronies deciding the policy of Russia based on their own sustenance.[79] Applebaum shares a similar thesis, which states that Putin and his "cronies" are essentially a product of the Soviet system,[80] which gained political ideas during the reign of Andropov, and for them the fundamental lesson was that the West is out to dismember Russia.[81] Russian survival, both economic and political, therefore primarily depends on opposing the West at any cost, in every way possible. Nichols states that Putin is a "Sovok," and there is no concrete rational ideology, other than to re-create the last two decades of the Soviet Union system of a handful of Russian elites taking advantage and sharing the profits of the Russian economy.[82] A version of this line of analysis claims that Russian foreign policy is essentially run by a handful of lobby groups who are close to Putin, especially the oil and gas and energy lobby, and the military industrial lobby. The Russian energy lobby and Russian state therefore has similar interests, and the influence of the energy sector on Russian behavior is evident in Russian aggressive influence and will to use the weaponized oil and gas economy over the post-Soviet space by such means as cutting off the supply of oil and gas, as an energy superpower.[83] The supremacy of the Russian energy sector is regarded as the sole determinant and not an area to be bargained, according to this analysis. The primary national goal is, therefore, to manage and strengthen the Russian role in global markets, and energy security is therefore a priority agenda.[84] A slightly different analysis was that Russian foreign policy is shaped by its military industrial complex, and that Russian aggressive actions in Syria and other areas near abroad is either due to an internal budgetary battle between its different segments of armed forces,[85] or a showcase of Russian weaponry to prospective buyers.[86]

If we return to the argument of color revolutions, as an aside, it is important to mention that while there are not many realist analyses of current Russian foreign policy, especially under Putin, there is a similarity between realist and liberal scholars highlighting the color revolutions as one of the chief factors behind Russia turning antagonistic. As mentioned above, the liberals highlight that color revolutions were perceived by Russian elites as a threat to Russian regime stability and increasing interference by the West in domestic affairs of Russia's near abroad in the name of democratic promotion. Realist scholars also agree, at least on this point, that color revolutions and NATO expansion in Russia's near abroad was the final straw in the already-toxic relationship between Russia and the West, although the causality is different. The recurrent theme of this line of analysis is that Russian assertive foreign policy from

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2003 onward had been a reaction to Western actions, which forced Russia to focus on more traditional geopolitical balancing roles. Putin's strategy here since 2003 is analyzed as a pragmatic, fluid use of resources and power, as a means of statecraft, especially when there is in effect no specific grand strategy other than balancing the West by successfully using economic, political, and military resources.[87] The rapid successive European developments, especially NATO expansion and color revolutions in former Soviet states, were regarded as a direct security threat to the Russian state, as well as a covert Western attempt to destabilize Russia's traditional sphere of influence.[88] The color revolutions and new democratic governments, in Georgia and Ukraine especially, were regarded by Russia as a threat to the status quo and the survival of the Russian state.[89] This line of analysis was continued more recently when Russian actions in the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia drew renewed attention on Russian strategy, including how or whether Russia uses hybrid tactics to sow discontent. Umland suggests Putin does not have a unified or coherent grand strategy as such, but rather is reflexively playing on the fear of the West, and Russia, acting as a traditional great power here, is focused on dividing Europe and is making it up as it goes, an assessment shared by Galeotti.[90] Putin, therefore, has been using a classic balancing tactic since 2003, and the fact that he is using a "pragmatic" divide-and-rule policy in Europe within NATO is highlighted in both Russian and EU analysis.[91]

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Mearsheimer echoed similar arguments that Russia's growing aggressive actions, since 2004, which culminated in the Ukrainian crisis, were primarily reactions to what he terms as the crawling "liberal hegemony" of the West for the last twenty years, including NATO expansion and intervention in Kosovo.[92] The arguments were essentially similar, that Moscow was pushed to the corner, as a great power, due to NATO/EU expansion, and it saw its strategic and military interests threatened in Ukraine (and later in Syria). As a result, according to Mearsheimer, as per the theoretical predictions of neorealism, it was inevitable that Moscow lashed out militarily, even at the great cost of economic retribution.

From this lens, every action of Russia is a reaction to Western actions. Götz echoed similar arguments in explaining the Russian aggression toward Ukraine, underlining three separate causes for Russian behavior, namely the geographical location of Ukraine, the EU activism in Eastern Europe, and the Ukrainian government's tilt toward a more pro-Western foreign policy. Götz maintains that a combination of these three factors led Russia to act more assertively toward Ukraine.[93] Bukkvoll analyses and reaches a similar conclusion about Russian actions in Crimea, stating that from the Russian perspective it looked like the West had exploited Russian weakness in the near abroad, using popular uprisings as a means of war, and all that contributed to Russian interests being threatened.[94] Russian analysts also mostly

share this line of assessment of Russia geopolitically balancing the West. Lukyanov wrote in 2016 that Putin's foreign policy is based on flexibility and predicated on the fact that the US hegemony and unipolarity is over and Russia is ready to take back its place in a great power rivalry.[95] Arbatov shares the same assessment of the Russian worldview, stating that the collapse of the world order is taken as an inevitability in Russian policy circles,[96] as does Karaganov, who predicts that in future, there will be some sort of tactical alignment with China when it comes to providing economic boost and security in the broader Eurasian region.[9]

To sum up, as discussed above, on careful reading of the literature on Russian foreign policy, four distinct phases can be determined, which shows broad continuity. The period from Soviet disintegration to the current government of Putin's third term, Russia managed to traverse the different political fragmentations, weak geostrategic and military status, international systemic constraints, and economic swings and resultant contradictory pulls in charting a foreign policy. The first phase is from Yeltsin's first foreign policy speech in 1991 and lasts broadly until 1994. Russian foreign policy in this phase was consistently pro-Western, focused on economic development, political and economic liberalization, and reforms, and oriented toward having a friendly relation with former adversaries in Europe and the United States. The second phase lasted from 1995 to 1999, around the start of the First Chechen War, which resulted in some political differences with the West. It continued with Primakov's premiership, resulted in a more multipolar and pragmatic approach toward foreign policy, and was parallel to widespread disillusionment within Russia with failed economic reforms, and hardline pushback against decreasing pro-Western factions in the Yeltsin government. However, even during this time, with all the rhetorical animosity, Russia acknowledged NATO and US hegemony, due to its own diminished military and relatively weak economic status. While there was a search for more pragmatic maneuvering, overall, it did not effect much qualitative change in Russian behavior, when it comes to NATO expansion, the Kosovo War, and the color revolutions.

The third phase of Russian foreign policy coincides with Putin's rise to power, and Russia's second Chechen War. Due to shared interests over the threat of Islamists and conflict in Central Asia and Caucasus, there was a tactical alignment with the United States and NATO, which was solidified even further after the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center and resulted in intelligence cooperation during the campaign in Afghanistan. Ultimately, the fourth phase of Russian foreign policy started around 2003, coinciding with the US invasion of Iraq. This is the final stage, which continues to this day. Differences over NATO expansion, color revolutions in

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former Soviet and Eastern bloc countries, and US/NATO interventionism in Iraq and Libya, influenced Russia to chart a more hard-balancing approach to foreign policy, with more traditional great power roles in the near abroad. Russia, in this phase, also was not shy to use overt and covert force, including hard power and interventions, in what Russia considered its traditional spheres of influence, regardless of how Russian economic strength was.

Current Russian assertive foreign policy also forces scholars to ponder whether the world is, indeed, in a new Cold War.[98] Russian interventions in Syria, Georgia, and Ukraine, and covert operations in the Baltics and Finland, provide compelling evidence of Russia in a more traditional great power role, considerably more assertive and different from the first three phases discussed above.[99] While Russian foreign policy always had the guiding component of national interest, even in its most liberal phases, it has now eventually arguably reacquired a foreign policy based on hard power balancing.[100] The Russian foreign policy since the Georgian war had its shares of cooperation with the West, even an arguably failed attempt at rapprochement, but so far they have been only tactical changes, nominal rather than substantial.[101] It can be argued that there is an observable common pattern: a short phase of cooperation, like the first phase of Yeltsin/Kozyrev and immediately after 9/11, followed by longer phases of pragmatic power politics. The first phase of Atlanticism was followed by an active seeking of multipolarity. The rapprochement and intense phase of cooperation immediately after the World Trade Center attack was followed by an ongoing and active great power balancing.

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The analysis of Russian foreign policy also follows specific traditions and schools, all of which provide valuable insights. The constructivist and liberal analysis of Russian foreign policy, as mentioned above, focuses broadly on cultural and economic/domestic influences, and provides significant explanation with regard to Russian state behavior. They both are also somewhat limited in their explanatory power. Considering the constructivist analysis first, it provides valuable understanding on what might "influence" the ideas behind Russian state behavior. It explains the notion of conceptual vacuums and the role of ideas; the role of honor, identity, and pride, and civilizational exceptionalism; and how it might influence Russia.[102] It, however, doesn't provide any measurable understanding on how much such ideas influence actual policy.[103] For example, a typical constructivist analysis of Russia would suggest that Russian civilizational pride and the resurgence of an Orthodox Christian identity shapes Russian support for conservative forces and far-right parties within Europe, but it then fails to explain the cooperation between Russia and the West during the same period of time, nor does it mention that Russia funds not just far-right, but also far-left groups within the EU, as a means to destabilize Europe rather than to pursue a grand strategy

based on a Christian conservative ideal.[104] A common such argument is that Russia is positioning itself as a cultural Christian conservative bastion and is promoting similar conservative forces across Europe. That, however, fails to explain that Russia is fundamentally supportive of any forces from any side of the political spectrum, regardless of conservatism or not, as long as those forces are opposed to the EU and the liberal world order. The idea that Russia is culturally conservative, and/or that Putin and his regime is guided by cultural and civilizational exceptionalism, fails to explain the deviations of Putin's foreign policy and its continuing cooperation with the West when it comes to intelligence sharing, space research and non-proliferation and talks with Iran and North Korea.[105]

Similarly, although it provides significantly more consistent analysis, a liberal economic argument has limitations in explaining Russian aggressive behavior, regardless of the strength of the Russian economy.[106] Barring few alignments, like one over the Libyan intervention, it is observable that Russia has only grown increasingly more assertive, willing to use hard power, especially in its sphere of influence, regardless of its declining and weakening economy.[107] The economic argument, however, might be helpful in explaining, to a limit, why Russia might not have carried on an intervention in Ukraine and changed gear from direct intervention and annexation in Crimea to a more low-tempered destabilization. It might also help explain Russian limited or shifting strategic goals and achievement in Syria.[108] But overall, Russian behavior since 2003, as discussed above, and its increasing will to use hard power, falls in line with traditional great power behavior, how great powers act ruthlessly when they perceive their interests to be under threat, and regime type or economic condition does not matter as such when it comes to defending interest or spheres of influence.[109] In the last two years, Russia has adopted the official view that any uprising in any area Russia perceives under its sphere of influence, including Syria and Ukraine, implies some sort of non-military warfare by the West. From viewing color revolutions as an ideological threat to Russian domestic regime, the Russian view has now changed to a position where any opposition, or intervention anywhere in the Russian sphere, is considered active Western interference with a geostrategic zero-sum outlook.[110]

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CAN REALISM EXPLAIN RUSSIA?

The debate over neorealism is twofold. Neorealism, as derived from realism, is both a philosophical tradition, as well as a social science research program; therefore, it could logically pose an infinite number of interpretations and debates. It is important to mention here that even though Kenneth Waltz's

theory of neorealism is the canonical baseline with or from which all structural realist concepts and sub-theories are derived, it is by no means considered complete and perfect, by either Waltz himself or other realists, and it is both modified and complemented by several other theories, sub-theories, and doctrines, some of which are themselves part of ongoing scholarly debates. Neorealism as a philosophical tradition is, therefore, a mutating and evolving concept, and it does not fall within the scope and ambit of this project to attempt such a grand discussion on that, and no attempt will be made as such.

As mentioned above, it is imperative to remember that the attempt here is more on theory testing, rather than theory building, and therefore the major focus in the upcoming chapters will be on testing Russian behavior against the theories and more essentially the sub-concepts of neorealism, notably security dilemma and offense-defense theory, which are discussed here, as those concepts specifically deal with great power behavior and can be tested against empirical evidence like policy papers, archived speeches, and troop movements, which is the key intention of this project.

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Russia is a great power, and realism dictates that great powers have the greatest impact on international politics. There is consensus that current great powers are categorized broadly on the basis of power dimension, spatial dimension, and status.[111] A great power is therefore assumed to be a country, among a set of countries, which possesses more influence over other countries and more effect on world politics and in international relations.[112] This is also categorized by Kenneth Waltz, who shed light on the characteristics of a great power by these five following criteria: namely population and territory; resource endowment; economic capability; political stability and competence; and military strength.[113] By all the aforementioned indices, Russia qualifies as a great power.[114]

WHAT IS NEOREALISM?

Realism, as proposed by Hans Morgenthau, was predicated on some key assumptions, chief among which was the idea of balance of power.[115] Kenneth Waltz draws on traditional realists like Morgenthau.[116] While Morgenthau was ambivalent about the possibility of developing a rationalist scientific theory of international politics, Waltz adopts, for the first time, a workable, systemic, structural approach.[117] Waltz's theory is considered canonical if one utilizes it as a theoretical framework for a project that defines or establishes an explanatory behavior of foreign policy, somewhat contrary to what even Waltz wanted at times. This framework has been the target of both different schools of realism, and even non-realists. Of all realist approaches, Waltz's neorealism is assuredly the most influential and certainly the most

controversial, and undoubtedly the target and approach of most scholars. Waltz's theory seems to have achieved a "position of intellectual hegemony in the discipline."[118]

Neorealism assumes systemic approaches to study and determine state behavior based on structures. The fundamental concepts of neorealism revolve around the concept of anarchy, structure, polarity, and balancing behavior and national interest.[119] Waltz informs that anarchy does not necessarily mean chaos or disorder, but rather an absence of hierarchy.[120] According to Waltz's theory of neorealism or structural realism, there is no overarching, all-imposing global authority that provides security and stability in the international system.[121] World politics is therefore lacking a structural hierarchical organization, as opposed to domestic politics, which is comparatively more hierarchical and centralized. This international system with its 'anarchic structure' has implications, as Waltz talks about the structures that can suddenly change as well, due to systemic changes, like the emergence of bigger powers, or revolutions.[122] In multipolarity, the chances of conflict increase, whereas in bipolarity the system is more stable. The reason is that states are drawn to the strength of poles, just as during the Cold War, and that in turn maintains a relatively peaceful world.[123] Also, perception about the intention of the other pole is comparatively clear and easy to measure for strategic calculations and strategic communications, compared to a multipolar system, where it is much more difficult. In short, the system forces states to take sides, just as they were forced to accept the new bipolarity during the Cold War.[124]

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As a result of this anarchical system, every actor in it is acting in its own interest, and "self-help" is the norm. Survival is the key objective in this system.[125] Nation states, and great powers, are, therefore, the primary unit or actors in this system, and they act in accordance with their interests. In an anarchic system, states are guided by their constant insecurity and notion of survival. International structure, rather than regime types, therefore, decide how states interact with each other.[126] Waltz's structural realist approach strives to cover a gap in the classical literature and helps in explaining why states behave broadly in similar ways despite their different forms of government and diverse political ideologies.[127]

Waltz's systemic theory and balance of power forms the bulk of his neorealist theory, and it is further enriched by other scholars and concepts that form baselines and frameworks in the course of this project. Waltz suggests that in an "anarchic world," the absence and presence of a government both guarantee violence, and that no human order is without violence. Waltz tries to explain that the structure of international politics influences and limits the cooperation between states, and structures also encourage certain behaviors and penalize others who do not conform. Waltz explains this rationale, that there are instances where states and powers ignore balance-of-power logic

and act in non-strategic ways due to various internal, domestic, unit-level variables, which is why it is difficult to predict individual state behavior; however, when states do act irrationally, the system punishes them.[128] On the other hand, states that act rationally are usually rewarded for their smart behavior by the system. Balance of power, therefore, explains such results and patterns; and it leads researchers to believe and predict that states will engage in balancing, and a strong tendency toward balancing will be more than bandwagoning between states. "States do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased dependence. In a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest," Waltz observed.[129]

The anarchic structure of the international system constrains and limits the behavior of states, according to Waltz, and as a result, bipolarity, or multipolarity, would always be produced by the system, which in itself would produce a tentative balance of power.[130] That might not last, due to instances of systemic changes due to the rise of domestic- and unit-level variable failures, like, for example, the rise of ultra-nationalism after the First World War, but eventually it would return to a balance guaranteed by a balance-of-power and deterrence factor, the reason being that the system will force the states to act in such ways.

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Waltz and his systemic theory, therefore, relies on the Darwinian logic of the system, as the states that misbehave or act irrationally are punished. Waltz talks about 'the process of selection,' which explains why 'those who conform to accepted and successful practices more often rise to the top,' while those who do not 'fall by the wayside.'[131] Waltz claims it does not matter whether states in the long run are either revisionist or status-quo power, the international structure would push them to pursue policies that would result in a balance of power.[132] Waltz maintains, for example, that states should not try to pursue hegemony, because it goes against the logic of rational behavior in a systemic theory, the logic being that the moment one state seeks hegemony, the other states will be forced to choose to balance against the rising hegemon. Waltz also argues, despite that, that sometimes states do seek hegemony and end up being balanced by other states or punished by the system, wherein states overreach and perish—imperial Germany and imperial Japan, as well as Nazi Germany, are examples of such reckless great powers. According to Waltz, smart states should realize the folly of ambition and avoid seeking absolute hegemony; they will seek to gain an 'appropriate amount of power.' In the eventuality that states seek additional power, Waltz maintains that their more important goal remains to ensure that other states do not gain power at their expense. 'The first concern of states,' he maintains, 'is not to maximize power, but to maintain their positions in the system.'[133] Under the theoretical framework of realism, therefore, one can assume that states will always be

concerned about their survival and will seek a favorable balance in the existing or altering balance of power.

HOW DOES NEOREALISM EXPLAIN STATE BEHAVIOR?

Drawing from Waltz's baseline, neorealist literature guides us to some basic distilled predictions regarding state behavior. States tend to balance. States prefer to prioritize relative gains, rather than seek absolute gains. States prefer to be more aggressive when they perceive that offense is preferable to defense.

The first set of predictions is related to internal balancing within states. Anarchy in the system does not necessarily mean violence, but rather a system of self-help; however, anarchy limits cooperation between states. Waltz identifies two ways in which the structure limits cooperation. He states, "The condition of insecurity"—at the least, the uncertainty of each about the other's future intentions and actions—works against their cooperation. A state worries about a division of possible gains that may favor other "more than itself." And "a state also worries lest it become dependent on others" through trade and/or cooperation, and therefore, it also chooses to limit its cooperation with other states.[134] He underscores that states do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased independence, since in a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest.[135] The structure of the system forces states into this kind of behavior, which in turn leads to states forming balances and balancing coalitions. Waltz draws three major conclusions with regard to balancing. States are unitary actors who seek their preservation. States seek to achieve this goal either through internal balancing (increasing economic and military strength) or external balancing (creating alliances) against rival states or peers. Finally, Waltz contrasts balancing and bandwagoning, wherein weaker states choose to ally with the stronger state. Waltz posits that "because power is a means not an end, states prefer to join the weaker of two coalitions."[136] Waltz notes the fundamental reason the anarchic international system restricts cooperation: insecurity and unequal gains; in the context of anarchy, each state is uncertain about the intentions and resolve of others and is afraid the possible gains resulting from cooperation may favor other states more than itself, and this leads it to dependence on others.

Stephen Walt adds on to this traditional balance-of-power theory.[137] According to him, states will balance against power to protect themselves, and states actually balance against threats and not just power alone.[138] The "Balance of Threat" theory complements and modifies the fundamental assumption of the balance-of-power theory, which is a core tenet of

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both classical and neorealist theory; it predicts that states attempt to prevent a potential hegemon by balancing against it.[139] Bandwagoning, on the other hand, also happens, due to both defensive and offensive reasons, as exemplified by Mussolini's Italy and Stalin's Soviet Union, and Walt draws the inference that states can be attracted to strength, especially during times of tension and conflict. The more a state demonstrates its strength, the more likely other states that observe the strength are supposed to be joining it.

Walt's theory of Balance of Threat is used as a framework. The baseline of this theory is that states (and especially great powers) balance against threats, rather than against power alone. The four factors that affect this balancing behavior are: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions. Aggregate power is the sum total of a state's power, including factors such as population, industrial and military capability, technological prowess, *et cetera*, which adds on to a state's threat component. As power can be threatening as well as rewarding, aggregate power, therefore, can influence both balancing and bandwagoning. Since the ability of power projection also declines or increases depending on the distance, threat perceptions are also influenced based on proximate distance and the vicinity of the threat. When it comes to offensive power, states might simply realize that balancing is not an option. If the offensive power is rapidly increasing in the neighborhood, then bandwagoning is a viable option. As Walt states, "When offensive power permits rapid conquest, vulnerable states may see little hope in resisting. Balancing may seem unwise because one's allies may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough."[140]

Finally, perception is an important factor, as states that appear threatening influence other states to balance. Offensive intention, therefore, leads to balancing behavior. Walt sums up his theory of alliance formations and balancing with the following three points: 1) states prefer to form alliances to balance rather than bandwagon; 2) ideology is usually a weaker cause of alliance formation than interests; and 3) only interests form alliances. Although aid reinforces alliances, it rarely creates them in the first place.[141] The reason balancing is more visible than bandwagoning behavior is simply because states, according to the neorealist theory, are interested in survival. Compared to that, in a bandwagoning world, states act in a much more competitive manner. Walt states that bandwagoning usually occurs among weaker states, because they are "more vulnerable to pressure" and because their resources are inconsequential. Also, bandwagoning occurs when allies are unavailable and when leaders believe that potentially threatening states can be successfully appeased. That is because great powers try to appear both strong and dangerous to attract other smaller alliance partners, which results in smaller states allying with the strongest or the most threatening states, which logically

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results in intense international rivalries. Since states do not usually want that, nor do that, it is Walt's theory that balancing behavior is the norm.[142]

Therefore, to summarize, the balancing behavior of states that one can predict from alliance formations are distilled as follows. When there is a perceived existential threat, states usually align with other states to balance the threat, and the greater the threat, the greater the tendency to balance. More offensively oriented threats form more defensive coalitions against them, just as the perceived intentions of a state matters. If a perceived intention of a state is aggressive, it results in more coalitions formed against it. Predictions on balancing and bandwagoning behavior are these: balancing is usually more common than bandwagoning, and stronger states tend to balance against threats, whereas weaker states may balance or choose to bandwagon based on availability of alliance support, the vicinity of the threat, and the perceived aggressive intention of the threat. During wartime, it is also observed that states bandwagon with the side winning the war.

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Often, however, that leads to a security dilemma.[143] If a state is relatively strong, it could influence other states to build up its capabilities, which will in turn threaten the stronger nation, and subsequently lead it to build up more capabilities. "If a nation is too strong, this can be provocative since most means of self-protection simultaneously menace others. On the other hand, if a nation is too weak, great dangers arise if an aggressor believes that the status quo powers are weak in capability or resolve. Thus, directly and indirectly, both strength and weakness can upset the balance of security in international relations."[144] For example, in a "spiral model," conflicts start when punishments are meted out with the expectation that it might reform or elicit better behavior from the other power, which can also fail and elicit a more aggressive behavior from the adversary. "Angered or frightened by the punishment, the other becomes more aggressive," thereby militarizing more or becoming more willing to use force to defend them.[145] In the "deterrence model," on the other hand, a conflict may arise when appeasement influences the rival power to miscalculate, resulting in further threats and ultimately, a breakdown of deterrence.[146]

Finally, neorealists claim that power is a relative concept, and that due to the anarchical nature of the international system, any gain in power by one state is logically a threat to the other state.[147] Therefore, it is assumed that any potential exchange between states must exactly preserve the preexisting balance of power (i.e., they focus on relative gains).[148] According to Robert Powell, the cost of fighting can be deduced by the offense=defense balance. Powell assumes that states seek to maximize their economic welfare. Joseph Grieco also contends that the structure of the international system and the relative nature of power forces political leaders to view the world in relative terms.[149] The hypothesis is that all states and leaders therefore prefer relative

gains.[150] Cooperation usually collapses in the model when the use of force is at issue, as is consistent with a structural realist order. However, given that the cost of war is sufficiently high, states realize it is foolish to attempt an absolute gain, and cooperation again becomes possible, which is in line with neoliberal institutionalism.[151]

NEOREALIST PREDICTIONS ABOUT GREAT POWER BEHAVIOR

To sum up, we get the following distilled set of assumptions and predictions about state behavior from neorealism. The first assumption is that states or powers interact with each other in an anarchic environment, which is a lack of hierarchy therefore with no authoritative overarching authority or 'international policeman.' The second primary assumption is that powers are self-protecting and the systemic rule they follow is one of self-help. *Self-help* in this sense means that states or powers watch out for their own security and tend not to rely too much on other powers for their well-being, and that state or power behavior is mandated by what they perceive to be in their interest. The third assumption is that there is always an ever-present threat to survival for every state, due to systemic anarchy, and a lack of the aforementioned overarching authority. The fourth assumption explains that even though states are presently the notable component of the system, neorealist theory is essentially group-centric. For example, a power could have been a kingdom, empire, states, or any other actors depending on the system in which they are operating. It will not necessarily change the way the system behaves or its constraints. Neorealists do not deny non-state actors as other variables; they simply do not consider them to be significant, considering their relative weakness to alter the system.

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The predictions regarding state behavior are that, in neorealism, states decide and act according to what they perceive in their external environment. According to neorealism, states tend to balance rather than bandwagon, even though bandwagoning happens occasionally. In times of weakness, states might choose to bandwagon, but in times of relative strength, it is likely that a state will choose to balance. Bandwagoning occurs when allies are unavailable, but when there is someone to support materially or strategically, balancing is the norm. When a security dilemma becomes intense, and when the states find preventive or preemptive wars more advantageous, offense takes priority. When wars can be short, quicker, and decisive, they are more common. States still, however, prefer relative gains, rather than absolute gains.

This gives us a template to judge Russian behavior. How much did Russians perceive NATO to be a threat after 9/11, and how much did it intend

to bandwagon with NATO? What influenced the intention of Russia, and how much of it was relative gains? While dealing with its own Islamist problems in the Caucasus, how much of the offense-defense theory influenced the Russian short war with Georgia? Why did Russia invade Ukraine, and how much were strategic interests, like a naval port in Crimea, defensive terrain in Georgia, bases, supply chains and markets, in both Ukraine and Georgia, taken into consideration? These are among the cases to be studied in light of the above-mentioned assumptions.

THE LOGIC OF BALANCING

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The basic tenets of realism as an international-relations theory have argued that neorealism can be used as a testable theoretical framework to test the foreign policy of a great power. This book rests on the organizing principle of balancing. In order to understand what that is, a brief explanation is necessary.

The logic of balancing is canonical and accepted in every school of realism.[152] Hans Morgenthau explained that the simple logic of balance of power is to achieve equilibrium, which is not only inevitable, but also essential as a stabilizing factor in international anarchy.[153] The periodic inability of achieving such equilibrium and balance in the international system is due to temporal conditions and peculiar factors, like hubris, miscalculations, and imperial overstretch, but over time, the equilibrium is achieved. The logic is predicated on the simple notion that the main actors (empires, or modern nation states and great powers) seek to survive as independent entities, in the anarchical global system, and avoid becoming subservient to the will of an adversarial state or rival empires. Anarchy in turn compels power consolidation, often resulting in a power imbalance and the preponderance of an actor, or a coalition of actors. This, in turn, leads to weaker states flocking together or aligning with larger powers for their security. The strategies of balancing involve external balancing and internal balancing. External balancing is primarily the formation of alliances as coalitions, but also threats, redistribution of resources, and on rare occasions, preventive wars. Great powers that are secure and capable with a preponderance of power often resort to external balancing. Internal balancing is simply the buildup of military capabilities and the economic and industrial foundations of military strength, and it comes from a position of defense.[154] In simpler terms, the balance of power is an arrangement of affairs so that no state shall be in a position to have absolute dominance over others.[155] Michael Sheehan defined it as a system that involves a particular distribution of power within the system, so there is no single state or alliance that possesses an overwhelming and preponderant amount of power.[156] Because hegemony is difficult to aspire to, and even

more difficult to achieve and continue, states, which are the primary actors in the international system, always find a way through alignments and alliances to balance the potential aggressor.[157]

The rising hegemon or coalition often seeks to eliminate threats from weaker rivals. Threatened states, in turn, could adopt different balancing strategies, whether internal balancing, such as a buildup of military strength and capability and stronger defense, or external balancing, which is aligning with a bigger power against common threats. Balance-of-power theorists suggest the power preponderance of a single state or of a coalition of states is highly undesirable as it usually leads to aggressive behavior and hegemonic aspirations.[158] By contrast, balance-of-power theorists suggest that peace is generally preserved when an equilibrium of power exists among great powers.[159]

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Ideally in a balanced state, or equilibrium, no single state or coalition possesses overwhelming power and incentive to wage war, as the power parity in an equilibrium prevents the idea of a quick or limited war and victory. Weaker actors usually flock together against a potential hegemon, or rapidly militarize and rearm, to dissuade a potential hegemon from aggressive action. In a system where there is no universal hegemon and there are various powers, some actors play the part of a balancer, by hedging for a weak state against a rising and strong adversary. For example, Britain balanced against Napoleonic hegemony by supporting Austrian and Prussian duchies and balanced against imperial Germany as well as Nazi Germany by backing France. Winston Churchill explained this logic by stating famously that for five hundred years, British foreign policy was primarily focused on opposing the strongest and most dominating power in continental Europe and joining weaker powers to oppose a military tyrant.[160] Similarly, during the Cold War, the United States exploited the Sino-Soviet rift. Henry Kissinger said it was always important to choose the weaker side in any balancing.[161] As mentioned by Stephen Walt, the logic behind this is simple and twofold. States can never be sure of an adversary's intentions, so backing the stronger power could lead to the stronger power crushing the weaker one, and then turning on the balancer. Secondly, supporting the weaker state against a stronger rising threat implies future influence and say in the affairs of the weaker state.[162]

Neorealists developed the logic of balance of power further; as Kenneth Waltz said, that balancing is a sensible behavior as the victory of one coalition over another leaves weaker members of the winning coalition at the mercy of the stronger one.[163] Waltz predicted that states engage in balancing behavior anyway, regardless of whether the balance is achieved. States according to Waltz are fixated on survival and stability; therefore, it does not matter if the balance, once achieved, will be maintained, but what matters is that states constantly will seek to balance and restore equilibrium. Waltz maintains that

states should not try to pursue hegemony, because it goes against the logic of rational behavior in a systemic theory—the logic being that the moment one state will seek hegemony, the other states will be forced to choose to balance against the rising hegemon. He also argues that despite that, sometimes states do seek hegemony and end up being balanced by other states or punished by the system, overreaching and perishing—examples being imperial Germany and imperial Japan, as well as Nazi Germany. 'The first concern of states,' he maintains, 'is not to maximize power, but to maintain their positions in the system.'[164] Of course, as mentioned above and earlier, balance of power often fails, due to various factors, hubris, expansionism, or overstretch, but since the system is Darwinian, the aggressor is often balanced, or in extreme circumstances, punished by rival coalitions.

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In sum, a balance of power is a natural equilibrium, as the international system is one of anarchy, and power and actors who aspire for hegemony beg to be balanced.[165] The logical argument for Moscow would be to balance against powers, whenever it feels relatively inferior to a peer rival, to ensure stability and equilibrium. If Moscow feels comparatively weaker compared to *any* rival power, great powers or alliance networks alike, Moscow would compulsively resort to either external or internal balancing. The balancing would be omnidirectional and observable against any peer rival. Russia, according to this logic, would balance against China, the United States, NATO, the EU, or any power that seems to threaten Moscow's position in the balance of power.

The logic of balance of power provides us with the broad understanding of how states behave in an overarching system, even when they fall short in predicting or explaining specifics of foreign policy, or the variables that influence cooperative or competitive behavior. Naturally, it does not help us with any particular set of predictions regarding balancing behavior. These simple hypotheses focus on the overarching threat of hegemony over the system. But by that logic, Moscow's balancing should be equally observable against both China and the West. Second, states react to threats even when the threat is not from a potential hegemon, but also from aggressors and states that are deemed threatening. A simple balance-of-power hypothesis is therefore limited in its explanatory power, as it does not go into details with regard to whether states display balancing behavior against only the strongest power or against threats as well. In that regard, Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory is a modification to the balance-of-power logic explained above and gives a fuller picture and is therefore the theoretical framework employed to study the cases.

BALANCING AGAINST THREATS

Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory adheres to the basic realist assumption that states dwell in an international anarchy that follows and assumes the primary realist tenet that there is no hierarchy in the international system and no central agency or institution to act as a global police force.[166] The ultimate aim of a state in such a system is survival and security.[167] States usually do not act aggressively or try to maximize power; rather, they attempt to maximize security.[168] The distinction is important here, as offensive realists argue that states maximize security by maximizing their relative power, whereas defensive realists, including Walt, argue that states simply maximize security to maintain their position in the balance, or uphold the status quo. An offensive realist power would try to maximize its relative power and take advantage of anarchy to increase its relative power. A defensive realist power would simply return to, or uphold, the status quo, as long as it is satisfied with the threat perception.[169]

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Foreign-policy decisions, as a result, naturally rely upon the perceived threat environment. Balance of Threat theory here acts as a modification of the standard balance-of-power logic in realism. While the balance-of-power theory suggests that states balance against power, and therefore respond to changes in the distribution of capabilities, Walt suggests that the logic lacks an explanation in answering the question as to when states balance against their adversaries, and when states bandwagon with a stronger rival.[170] Facing a significant external threat, great powers choose to either "balance" or "bandwagon." *Balancing* is defined by Walt as allying with other powers against the greater threat, whereas *bandwagoning* refers to aligning with the source of danger.[171] Walt theorizes that balancing behavior is much more common than bandwagoning, simply because bandwagoning tends to reward the belligerent behavior of great powers and leaves smaller powers at the mercy of the greater threat. Walt further states that powers are inclined to use force if they assume that others will be unlikely to balance against them. The conditions, favoring either balancing or bandwagoning, are dimensions of threat, the availability of allies, and the security climate. Weaker states are more likely to bandwagon rather than balance. That is because weak states can do little to alter the hegemonic ambition of a greater threat and might choose to bandwagon. Stronger states, in contrast, can take the risk of balancing. Secondly, Walt argues that states will choose to bandwagon more if there are no allies available.[172] If there are, they might pursue balancing behavior. Finally, Walt argues that states balance more during peacetime, when the survival of the nation is not at stake. In wartime, more bandwagoning behavior

is visible, especially among weaker states, as states sometimes take fewer risks and/or choose to tactically align with the winning or aggressor power.[173]

Unpacking the above-mentioned hypotheses gives us some key assumptions and indicates some key behavioral patterns. Walt argues that states do not balance against power alone, but against threats, and the following key factors, aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive military power, and offensive intentions affect state behavior.[174] Accordingly, states actually respond to perceived threats, which are a combination of different factors. First, "aggregate power," or the power to compel adversaries, which depends on the combination of the state's total resources including population and industrial/military capabilities, affect such perception. Walt suggests that the greater the aggregate power, the greater is the threat perceived by a peer rival. An example of how aggregate power shapes the foreign policy of a state is shown by Walt in the example of George Kennan and Walter Lipmann's suggestions, as they defined what a US grand strategy would be in the early days of Cold War.[175] According to Kennan and Lipmann, the aim of a US grand strategy should be to maintain the superiority of US aggregate power over the total industrial resources of any peer rival in the entire Eurasian landmass. In practical terms, that means the United States would ally against any state poised to dominate Eurasia. Similarly, the British grand strategy, from Lord Castlereagh to Sir Edward Grey, justified the concern for aggregate power across Europe and to intervene whenever that balance appeared to be lost.[176]

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Second, we must consider "geographic proximity." Walt states that the ability to project power declines with distance, as states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away.[177] States are more threatened if the threat originates nearby than faraway, especially if not separated by buffer states or high seas. Walt draws examples from British balancing against Germany and American interventions in Latin America.[178] Germany and Japan started growing a great power and armament program around the same time, during the late nineteenth century, but the fact that British balancing behavior was toward Germany, and not Japan, was influenced by German proximity and the perceived threat. Similarly, American interference in Latin America against Marxist regimes during the Cold War was influenced by a similar line of thinking. Geographic proximity influences threat perception. Alternatively, it also explains the phenomena of spheres of influences. Sometime when a small state feels threatened by a great power and expects no help from other great powers farther away, it chooses to bandwagon rather than balance the threat, purely to survive, which results in the formation of a sphere of influence.[179]

Third, "offensive power" is somewhat related to aggregate power, in the sense that if a state is more powerful, it is supposed to invite a balancing alliance against it. Offensive power is, however, different from aggregate power.

More specifically, it means the ability to threaten the territorial integrity or sovereignty of a state at an acceptable cost. In simpler terms, the implication is that when a state views the threatening rival's offensive power to be overwhelming, there are chances of bandwagoning; otherwise states balance. For example, prior to the First World War, heavy German armament forced Britain to bolster her own naval fleet in an internal balancing action, whereas the same action forced other European powers to consider accommodating German potential hegemony, as resistance was seemingly futile.[180] This, Walt states, is another reason "spheres of influence" emerge, as great powers like buffer zones, and smaller weaker states, usually bandwagon with a threatening neighboring great power.[181]

Fourth, "offensive intention" is important. The perception of intent greatly influences alliance choices. A powerful state with a benevolent intent might not be considered threatening, as Germany, under Bismarck, maintained the necessary equilibrium.[182] However, after Bismarck, the continuous and increasing German aggressive intentions helped start the Triple Entente. If a state is believed from its actions to be unusually aggressive, then the potential target state will seek to actively redress the threat intent, by balancing or bandwagoning actions.[183] Walt explains this by showing how the combination of aggregate power, geographic proximity, and the perception of offensive intention caused Western European states to balance against the Soviet Union, but not the United States.[184] Walt's theory, therefore, suggests that states are reactive and not assertive, and that states do not just balance against *powerful* states; rather, they balance against threatening states.

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Walt further states some hypotheses with regard to state behavior based on these assumptions, as simple state behavioral patterns can be deducted. Since states balance based on threats, naturally the greater the aggregate power, the greater the chance of a state to balance against the powerful state.[185] However, if a state is farther away, as geographical proximity is a factor in the perception of power, states will likely balance more if the threatening power is nearer. A strong state will also likely balance against a near peer rival that is superior, but this is dependent on other factors. While states are attracted to strength, which is why bandwagoning occurs, usually the greater the perceived threat, the greater the chances that states will seek a balancing behavior.[186] Walt states that balancing behavior has historically been more common than bandwagoning behavior. The reasoning for this is simple. In a bandwagoning world, the smaller power that seeks to bandwagon with the greater, more threatening power will essentially have to depend on the well-meaning intentions and mercy of the larger power. Walt notes that both Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany underestimated and miscalculated the cost of aggression as they believed states would bandwagon to power alone, when states started to balance against them, due to their hegemonic intention.[187] Since states can

never be sure of another great power's intention, they tend to balance more than bandwagon. Bandwagoning increases the chance of a power becoming more threatening. Because perceptions in the best circumstances are unreliable, balancing behavior is more common. The second hypothesis is that the weaker the state, related to the strength of the peer rival and the threatened aggressive intention, the more chances of a bandwagon than a balance. The reason is when the weaker state realizes it will not be able to do anything to affect the outcome, it chooses to bandwagon rather than balance. The interest of the weaker state lies in its immediate periphery. Third, states usually bandwagon when there are no available allies. This is not just a tautological statement. Walt explains that it indicates how states, when they feel lonely in the international arena and they have no choice of any balancing alignment, tend to bandwagon with the bigger threatening power.[188] For example, the shah of Persia bandwagoned with Russia as the British empire withdrew from Afghanistan. Finally, during peacetime, there is a tendency to balance. But during certain war, or imminent conflict, and when the outcome seems almost certain, there is a tendency to bandwagon more. During wartime, weaker states are tempted to defect and join the winning side. Bandwagoning usually occurs in those times. For example, both Romania and Bulgaria initially aligned with Nazi Germany, and then they joined the Allies during the latter part of the war.

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To summarize the hypothesis of when states balance and when states bandwagon, Walt outlines the following.[189] In general form, in peacetime, states, when they face a threatening power, tend to balance against that power. The greater the power of the threatening state, the faster the balancing behavior, and the greater the offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions, the more the chances of a balancing behavior from rival powers. However, two significant changes occur: when the threatening state is much more powerful, the outcome of belligerence is predetermined, and when there are not many allies to tactically align with, bandwagoning behavior might be the behavior seen. Walt mentions that from these general hypotheses, we can conclude that in general, balancing behavior is more common, more predictable, and natural than bandwagoning behavior.

Considering the above-mentioned assumptions, logically Russia would balance against threats and not powers, rather than bandwagon with threats. Russian threat perceptions would be dependent on aggregate power and offensive capabilities, as well as perceived offensive intentions. The greater the perceived threat, the greater the balancing action observable. And if Russia is a defensive realist power, acting per the Balance of Threat theory, then Moscow would act as a security maximiser. Moscow would take all necessary balancing actions, as long as the threat remained, and it would resort to upholding the status quo, where Moscow is the dominant player in the

balance. Lacking a perceived threat, or when the threat is neutralized according to Russia, Moscow would move back to a status-quo position. Moscow would not take the advantage and press on with any balancing or aggression as long as it was satisfied the perceived threat had been neutralized.

EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THREAT PERCEPTIONS

While we have an idea how states might or might not react while facing a threat, there are some other minor factors that influence state behavior. Individually these factors are often not enough to tilt great power behavior, but combined with the threat posed by a rival power or alliance, these factors become important in predicting behavioral patterns. Walt highlights three factors—ideology, foreign aid, and transnational penetration—and the hypotheses for each, which are described below.[190]

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Ideological solidarity is often considered to be one of the bases of alliance formations. Liberals especially think sharing political and cultural traits allows or compels states to align together. Democratic Peace Theory, or the fact that liberal Democratic states usually do not clash or go to war with each other, is one key example of such line of argument. Walt admits that ideology is a factor, but he states that it comes secondary to other, more strategic interests, and it never forms a solid bond necessary for alliances.[191] While ideological solidarity is important in alliance and balancing behavior, security considerations take precedence over ideological preferences, and often ideology-based alliances falter when security interests differ. The Sino Soviet rift is one major example, when geostrategic and territorial interests in Asia prevailed over communist solidarity.[192] Walt postulates that states will follow ideological preference as long as they are secure and not threatened, and when faced with danger, they will take whatever allies they can get.[193] In sum, security considerations take precedence over ideology, and ideological alliances survive longer when interests align.

Similarly, Walt explores foreign aid and transnational penetration as other minor factors that influence alliance behavior.[194] It is regarded that foreign aid creates effective allies because it communicates favorable intention, as well as evokes gratitude for the recipient is in debt to the donor. Walt states that while it is true, it is more complicated. The dependence of the recipient is a factor in establishing how much the alliance will be on solid ground. For example, if the client state faces immediate threat and the donor state is secured, then the importance of the latter increases with the former. Similarly, Walt terms *transnational penetration* as a factor determining balancing behavior. Transnational penetration can be either public officials with

divided loyalties, or foreign lobbyists altering public perceptions, or foreign propaganda. Such penetration, according to Walt, is more effective against open societies than closed societies. Walt states that the greater one state's access is to the political system of the other one, the greater the tendency of the two to ally.[195] Therefore, if there is more communication between two states, the chances of rivalry decrease. Alternately, the more closed a state gets, the chance of alliance decreases, and balancing increases. Penetration is also more effective when objectives are limited.[196]

REVOLUTIONS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND HEIGHTENED SECURITY COMPETITION

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Finally, Walt utilizes his Balance of Threat theory to explain how revolutions affect the international system, and how it might lead to heightened security competition and increased threat perceptions. The reason this is important to outline is because it is a model of the utilization of Balance of Threat theory, as an explanatory theory of revolution, and it will help us explore Russia's behavior with regard to the color revolutions in its neighborhood. Walt uses the Balance of Threat theory and states that the foreign-policy decisions of a state are dependent on the perception of the external security environment of the state.[197] The level of threat is affected by the changing balance, as the incentive for a state to use force against its adversaries increases when the state is weak. In other words, weak states invite aggression. Walt states that revolutions are serious games that result in the shakeup of the whole system and the region. In two ways, revolution can shake up the security environment. First, as a result of a revolution, an aggressor state might sense the weakness of the revolutionary state, and in turn, choose to attack the state that was toppled by the revolution.[198] That is straightforward, and it usually results in territorial annexation and war. Second, when a power becomes concerned about a revolution in a neighboring country, or its sphere of influence, or an allied state, it seeks to improve its own position, as it is concerned a rival power will take advantage, either to obtain the spoils, or to prevent another rival power from staking out a claim. It results in a heightened security-dilemma spiral, inviting powers that essentially have no stake in the fray.[199]

A revolution, in this case, can mean a sudden shift in a regime, with the old ruling elite replaced by a new ruling elite, which could be either by violence or by peaceful overthrow. Revolutions in the neighborhood can cause major short-term disruptions, like a shift in the balance of power, international alignments, and opportunities for other states to improve their position. A revolution changes the internal dynamics of a state, leaving it weakened. Revolutionary elites are often poorly prepared to run a government, or

manage diplomacy, and old regime members either flee, instigating reaction from abroad, or are purged.

Four changes occur in the system due to a revolution. First, a revolution brings to power a regime that is mostly opposed to the old regime, which results in states allied to the old regime becoming naturally suspicious and even antagonistic. Neighboring states, and great powers, especially the ones allied to the old regime, view the disruption and changes as potentially destabilizing and dangerous to their own interests and stability. Second, any further action of the revolutionary state exacerbates the security dynamic in the region. A revolutionary regime is unsure of the other state's intentions, and simply because it has no direct experience of dealing with such a situation, it essentially acts or takes steps that exacerbate the situation. The revolutionary state also inevitably falls back and relies on ideology, thereby blaming all allies of the old regime as naturally hostile to the new regime. Revolutionary regimes also harbor suspicion based on historical animosity, and the chance of any small diplomatic disturbance leads to broader ramifications. Revolutionary regimes also assume the worst in other great powers and former states that were allies to the previous regime, and they interpret ambiguous or inconsistent policies as hostile. Third, the former allies of the previous regimes and adversarial great powers are also almost certainly sure to be ambiguous at this stage, as they do not know how to respond to the revolutionary regime or know their intention. The elites of both the revolutionary regime and the deposed regime and the great powers exaggerate the threat emanating from the other side. The revolutionary regime tries to exploit the threat to rally for nationalist or ideological causes and justify harsh measures.

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Finally, and most importantly, foreign powers contribute to the spiral of conflict and hostility. As revolutionary states emphasize past injustices, foreign interference leads to a breakdown of communication and a negative spiral. Foreign powers also inevitably intervene the moment a new regime's domestic program is supposed to affect their interests. While revolutionary states are inherently weak and insecure, they try to portray strength within, often aggressively, which affects the strategic interests of other powers. Revolutionary states also overreact to threats disproportionately, simultaneously acting overconfident and insecure, thus giving mixed signals to rival powers. The revolutionary state, feeling vulnerable, often overreacts, which can encourage balancing behavior in different powers. Powers opposing the revolutionary regime might feel that the revolutionary state wants to expand, as they are weak, and the only means to expand is to export the revolution and encourage it in neighboring states.

A revolution in the neighborhood, therefore, creates the perfect situation to test a Balance of Threat theory, and it creates the perfect conditions when a great power can feel threatened, without any active hostility from other

powers. All the above-mentioned factors boil down to the fact that a great power, while watching a revolution unfold, is not sure of the intentions of the state where the revolution is happening, or other powers that might take advantage of the situation, thereby creating a perfect security dilemma. A revolution encourages all concerning parties to believe the other presents a grave threat, and it alters the sense of reality and increases the perception of threat. Furthermore, these perceptions naturally encourage third parties to step in or intervene, either to eliminate potential threats or to gain an upper hand over a strategic regional rival. In simpler terms, a revolutionary state provides the ideal situation for a security dilemma.

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CONCEPTUAL BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN STUDYING RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

E.H. Carr argued that construction of historical knowledge is in itself a social process, where various contexts are studied to produce one historical knowledge.[200] Carr, for example, saw that historical knowledge in itself dilutes the understanding of interpretations, and rather presents facts to be studied from various sources. Scholarship is then dependent on those facts. Historians are therefore fine process tracers and are proficient in sequencing events. Social scientists, especially in the security studies subfield, on the other hand, derive connections within historical events.

Security studies in international relations therefore rely on historical events to build narratives and document observable patterns. Recent scholarly works demonstrate a similar methodology, of pattern recognition from various historical events, mostly for either theory building or theory testing. They are also mostly reliant on case-study methods. As Bennett and Elman wrote, qualitative case-studies methods have considerable advantage in studying complex phenomena and finding patterns for theory-testing purposes.[201] Most prominent studies involving war and great powers often involve various structural and agent-based variables, many of which rely on secondary sources and interpretations. Many of those involve agents with strong incentives to bluff or deceive other actors. A case study, therefore, has characteristic strength in negating some of those issues with a combination of observational methods and interpretations based on established scholarly literature.

Case-study method, in the security studies subfield, is therefore accepted with the caveat that the data will be reliant on accepted interpretations.[202] That should not raise questions on the validity of the project, simply because the project is a theoretical study, which relies on historical interpretations to make a theoretical case. The data by definition is assessed and corroborated alongside observable evidence. For example, if Russian troops move out of a

region, or return to status-quo ante, while there were opportunities to advance further, the inference from that can be clear as a sign of Russian retrenchment, or at least a proof of Russian disengagement, or intentional pullback. Now, whether that is due to structural causes or ideational causes is irrelevant to the purpose, which seeks to understand an event in grand strategic terms. If again the Russian troops are pulled back, and that is corroborated with a desired intention in a military journal, or a statement by someone in the upper echelons of the Russian military or civilian chain of command, then that can be considered further evidence in proving or disproving a hypothesis.

A challenge and criticism of such a method is that it can lead to atheoretical and disjointed studies. However, as previous similar studies showed, there is a way to get around that problem. For a single case, two different outcomes, coming from similar situations, can be studied, against one another, over a single time period, or across various time zones.

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Stephen Walt's *Revolution and War* uses this research design, where Walt studied why states undergo a revolution, often after a war. Walt studied foreign policies before and after they underwent revolutions, in turn to study how revolution affected foreign policy. Elaborating that individual case to a broader project, Walt compared revolutionary states to see then which instances had similar reactions and which did not, and what variables were present or absent. The study allowed Walt to have various comparisons, by studying three cases in detail. Another such example is Randall Schweller's *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, which studied balance of interests, in three different cases, across different timelines. All these studies rely on secondary literature as established historical analyses, to understand and elaborate on a more theoretical understanding of causality.

Case-study methods are also conclusive, as various individual cases make up different parts of the study to form a conclusive whole, which would otherwise make no sense. Causation is established through causal mechanisms in various hypotheses, none of which are similar or directly comparable. One case, for example, can be a broad study across time, and the other case can be a detailed study of a place or region. Only taken together, they may allow analysts to draw conclusions about whether the analyses are adequately explanatory. Case-study methods can be both inductive or deductive, for both theory building and theory testing. Case-study methods in inductive research might have various cases, studied to find a single theory. Conversely, in a deductive study, a theory is already in place, which is then tested alongside various cases, to see if the theory accurately explains the case.

Likewise, this book employs a positivist, qualitative, and deductive approach of case-study research.[203] Qualitative methods have been equally important in the IR subfield as quantitative approaches, and every major

program in the IR subfield has benefited from the application of case-study methods. As Bennet and Elman note, "Qualitative approaches, especially the intensive study of one or a few cases, allow for the development of differentiated and more closely focused concepts."[204]

The central data-collecting approach employed is qualitative. Case-study methods rely heavily on comparative case studies of cases that are relatively similar, as a way of evaluating claims about causal processes. The two-sensible way of avoiding the allegation of selection bias is to first select cases that best serve the purpose of the inquiry, and second, to select cases that maximize the strength and number of tests for the theories and hypotheses. While in-depth single case studies offer strong studies of single events, a more comparative method is applied in a systematic analysis of a small number of cases, to test competing hypotheses or theories. It also helps in a controlled, structured, and focused analysis, especially in the field of security studies. Theories, according to Walt and Mearsheimer, should mirror reality.[205] The ways of theory testing include covariation and process tracing.[206] Covariation is where tests determine if the hypothesized cause is present, but also to see whether the outcome is different when the cause is absent.[207] In process tracing, the aim is to determine if the predictions of the theory are applicable by checking if the causal mechanisms are similar to the manner they depict.[208] Process tracing indicates that if A leads to B, there would be evidence from A to B, and it would be possible to collect and gather evidence from the cause to the effect.[209]

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There is, however, data limitation when it comes to research on Russia, especially on Russian foreign policy.[210] While it is easier to conduct than in Soviet times, archival research, as well as process tracing, is difficult, simply because archives and evidence are difficult to access. That said, process tracing will be used in parts, whenever necessary. Process tracing can involve both inductive and deductive study of events and sequences within a case, as Elman notes, and depending on the theory being tested, exploring intervening events within a case leads to determining whether the theory is an accurate explanation of the case.[211]

A key data source for this book is the collation and analysis of documents related to the Russian relations with Ukraine, Georgia, and NATO. These are already readily available secondary sources, including policy papers and their analysis, as well as research papers analyzing specific phases that will be studied. Secondary source documents that are available in online archives will be studied. Primary sources, like available online Kremlin archives, Russian defense doctrine papers, and other white papers, will also be studied. Documents such as newspaper articles, think tank reports, and specific policy-focused scholarly literature are thematically analyzed. A study of collected and archived analysis is employed, which aims to rigorously interpret

a range of documentation to analyze the variables affecting the behavior of Russia.

There are three potential methodological and conceptual barriers and limitations I faced, and that I tried to neutralize, and the rest I justify here. None of them are opposed to the overall findings and make this project invalid. But all of them need to be addressed.

The one issue that stands out is the quality of evidence studied. For example, a statement by Vladimir Putin or Sergei Lavrov might be targeted for domestic consumption or international consumption, but it is difficult to understand the intention behind the rhetoric. No analyst or scholar can justify and guarantee that much objectivity. Overall, any historical analysis and research takes statements at face value and considers them to be reliable, and to question intention behind each and every sentence of any political written or oral statement will start discussions that will never be satisfactorily solved in this book, or in a lifetime. The reliability of rhetoric is always therefore a cause of concern for any research project.

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This book attempts to bypass that problem by relying on "observed" evidence. This is not an "area studies" project. Most of the evidence studied is comprised of secondary sources, which are then connected with news and other available resources to primarily infer, and then construct, a historical argument that corroborates the theoretical questions at hand. For the most part, the research, whether it is of Russian balancing actions or lack thereof after a specific phase of NATO enlargement, or Russian military operational procedure in Georgia, or the details of the logistics and supply chains of Russian military in Eastern Ukraine, are based on observable evidence, news, secondary scholarship, and military literature—and any political rhetoric, so much that it is even used, is only there to add extra weight to an argument. The central arguments hang and fall on the question of Russian actions, and not political rhetoric or military literature, and from what has been studied so far, the conclusion will not change either way.

Second, this book might be accused of being Eurocentric. That is a fair point and an acceptable argument. The question of why China, for example, is not studied as a case, is discussed in detail. The simple reason is this. Two requirements needed to be fulfilled: one, the need for a state or alliance that is considered a strategic threat in Moscow, and two, it must be against whom Russia has displayed both aggressive balancing behavior or military aggression, as well as periods of cooperation and rapprochement. Ukraine and Georgia, as well as NATO, fall under that category, as well as avoid selection bias, one being an institution and two being nation states. China fails to meet those criteria.

The only other case that could have supplemented, or been used instead of any of my cases, is Syria. While Syria itself was not considered a threat by

Moscow, Russia nevertheless intervened in Syria, clearly feeling threatened by something, whether it was a worry of losing a warm water naval port in the Mediterranean or the threat of another client state and friendly regime toppled, or the threat of jihadists originating from Russia. Those are valid lines of academic inquiry, and they quite possibly supplement the findings of this research. That being said, this project can be called Eurocentric research. That does not diminish the value of this research, or its applicability in policy formulations in the Euro-Atlantic statecraft, given the retrenchment tendencies in the UK and the United States, as well as the push for further fiscal and military consolidation of the European Union, which will inevitably lead it into a potential competition with Russia. It also leaves the option for further research, to replicate the findings in other parts of the globe, or with other great powers. The book, while focused on a specific geographical region, still remains externally valid and generalizable.

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Finally, this book does not claim to answer all theoretical questions. The intention was to provide a theoretical understanding of Russian foreign policy, simply because no such attempt has been made, with multiple cases, over a given period of time, under different Russian regimes and leadership. At the time of writing this book, there are two conflicts in which Russia is currently involved, in Syria and Ukraine, with the United States reneging on the INF treaty, and possibly the START treaty as well, there are protests going on in Moscow, and NATO is increasing funding under constant pressure from Washington, DC.

Like Walt himself wrote in the opening of *The Origins of Alliances*, I am also primarily relying on secondary sources in investigating a theory rather than building one, and the assessment is based on the scholarship provided by the area specialists and military theorists. Within the time frame and limitations of durability, funding, and primary-source research, I have tried as best as I could to provide a study that somewhat helps in answering certain broad theoretical questions and in formulating policy. The aim is not to provide a definitive history of post-soviet Russian foreign policy, or even my own *magnum opus*, but rather to test a theory to see if Russia can be termed as a realist power, which in turn will help Western policymakers to decide and debate on a future grand strategy moving forward.

That realism is not just a grand theory of international relations, that can be used as a theory of foreign policy to study particular states and great powers, but there are theories within the framework of realism that could be used to explore the foreign-policy behavior of a state or a great power that have already been discussed in detail. I highlighted that I chose the Balance of Threat theory to understand Russian phases of cooperative and antagonistic behavior. The Balance of Threat theory was chosen because, as discussed above, it gives a broader spectrum of causal variables, which includes

structural factors like aggregate power, territorial integrity, and industrial and military capabilities, that might constitute a threat to a country, as well as factors like the offensive intention of a state or alliance.

Walt used his theory to study alliance formations and balancing behavior in the Middle East, and he came to the conclusion that nation states balance against the most threatening state rather than the most powerful state.[212] The theory was further tested in other studies testing alliance behavior and threat perceptions in the Middle East.[213] Recently, Bock et al. explored the Ukrainian crisis, which was, at the time of the study, still in its nascent state, through the lens of the Balance of Threat theory.[214] In all these studies, two factors were explored: namely, the source and the intensity of the threat, and how it affected the behavior of the state or great power. The reaction of the dependent variable was studied, and documents and policy briefs, as well as speeches, were used as evidence. I try to use that template.

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The theory explored above gives an idea of what might constitute a threat for a great power. The challenge is to distill the assumptions and form testable predictions to see if Russian behavior attests to the theory, and to find suitable cases to explore the theory. The logic of the Balance of Threat theory suggests that Russia balances against threats and not just other powers. So, the logical questions that come are: What, then, are perceivable threats for Russia, and will Russia react as per the theory suggests when the threats increase, and accordingly, when the threats decrease? Second, when Russia does not react in the way a great power is supposed to in the face of a threat, is that due to the absence of one or many causal variables stated in the theory?

These factors and assumptions combined can form several independent, mutually enforceable mechanisms, giving rise to several different hypotheses, depending on the variables. Following Walt's theory, Russian foreign policy and behavior would have some simple patterns that would be observable. To start with, the Russian state, regardless of regime type and era, might feel threatened by any power or coalition with overall greater aggregate power than Russia. That would include great powers, alliances, and coalitions. That threat perception would incrementally increase if the source of the threat moved closer to the Russian landmass and decrease if it moved away from the Russian landmass. That would ideally be reflected in Russian defensive behavior, including defense doctrines and force positioning. The threat perception would also increase if Russia perceived the source of the threat as having offensive power or remain low if Russia perceives it lacks offensive power. Therefore, logically, Russian behavior toward different states at the same time might vary, even if they are both adversarial states; the one that displays offensive power would make Russia feel threatened more than the other state that is investing on defensive power and weaponry. For example, at any given time, if two neighboring state are engaged in an arms buildup,

the one with more investment in offensive firepower would threaten Russia more. Russia might identify both states as sources of threat, however, and be more antagonistic to one state and more cooperative or indifferent to the other state, depending on offensive power. Finally, Russian behavior toward different states might vary depending on what it perceives as offensive intention. If Russia identifies that a great power or an alliance has enormous offensive power as well as aggregate power, but no offensive intention, it might display different behavior than when it perceives the state or great power or coalition is displaying offensive intention. Similarly, if Russia perceives that the source of a potential threat is moving close to the Russian landmass, but not displaying any offensive intention, Russia might not display balancing behavior.

Similarly, combined with the above hypotheses, external factors would also influence Russian behavior. If, at a given time, Russia identifies two differing, simultaneous sources of threat, but it finds a common ideological solidarity with one, then Russia will display bandwagoning or cooperative behavior or tactically align with that source of threat, and balance against the other, greater source of threat, regardless of how powerful a potential threat that great power or coalition might be with which Russia is bandwagoning. However, the bandwagoning or cooperative behavior will only last as long as Russia's own security interest is not affected. In other words, no amount of ideological similarity will guarantee continuous cooperative behavior if security considerations differ. For example, two states might have an ideological similarity, like China and the Soviet Union, but other security concerns, like territorial disputes or encroachment, will still lead to aggressive behavior. If Russia feels that a source of threat has offensive intention, and if Russia feels there is the possibility of transnational penetration, that might lead to Russia to believe that any foreign propaganda is an attempt to destabilize the Russian regime and is a threat to Russian interests.

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Finally, a revolution or regime change in the neighborhood, added to existing threats, might lead to all-out war, or a security dilemma spiral. In any given situation, revolutions in the neighborhood raise the possibility of conflict or a security dilemma spiral, and if that is added to other assumptions, the chances of conflict increase. If Russia feels other powers or coalitions are taking advantage of the revolution in its neighborhood, that perception might lead to balancing behavior directed toward the other powers and coalitions. If Russia perceives the coalition or power is advancing toward the Russian landmass, then balancing will increase. However, if offensive power and offensive intention are added to this volatile mix, then the chances of balancing behavior might change to preempting a conflict. The greater the perceived threat is toward Russian territorial integrity, security, and strategic interests, as well as Russian economic interests, the higher the chances of Russia taking

aggressive action will be. These are some of the simple, testable hypotheses in general form that one might conclude from the earlier espoused theories.

Accordingly, as discussed above, the assumptions we gather from the theory help us identify how Russia might behave. To begin with, there is aggregate power, which is a combination of a state's total resources, which include population and industrial/military capabilities. A higher aggregate power in a peer rival might alter the perception of threat, which might result in internal balancing, an arms race, or a search for allies. If the theory is correct, the political debates within the dependent variable in such a situation is supposed to acknowledge the high or rising aggregate power in a rival state or alliance. There would be an acknowledgment of the need to internally balance against peer rivals.

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Geographical proximity is the second variable, which claims that if a source of threat with extremely high aggregate power is within the close geographical proximity of a state or great power, without any territorial buffer state or high seas in between, the threat perception rises. There will be noticeable actions and policies undertaken in the behavior of the state in question, whether it is internal balancing actions—like defensive actions including military expenditure or the repositioning of armaments or weapons systems—or external balancing actions—like cultivating alliances in buffer zones—or both. A closer threat with increased or increasing aggregate power will result in greater concern and an elevated threat perception in a state or great power, which will influence its balancing or bandwagoning behavior accordingly, and it will be reflected in policy decisions and speeches. The threat perception rises even more if the aggregate power is also coupled with offensive power, that is the power to physically threaten the existence of the regime, government, infrastructures, and economic and territorial integrity of the state. Historical animosity or ideology in this case could be important factors in deciding whether a power is or will be considered offensive by its rivals. In such a situation, we would see there are urgent balancing actions that will take place. In Salavatian's study, for example, the period highlighted was when Ahmedinejad was elected in Iran.[215] The immediate reactions were a revision of war doctrines in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia tactically aligning with Israel against Iran.[216] There was observable evidence of this tacit cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia, taken against Iran. Likewise, I point out below, in the eventuality of Russia facing such a threat, there will be certain observable actions and policies in place. Most importantly, if a state believes these factors are combined with offensive intent—that is the intention to harm the state's interests, either economically or strategically—that will imply the great power or state will think the source is existential and will behave accordingly. While Walt claims all these factors are equally

important, it is the offensive intention of a peer rival that matters the most for the dependent variable.[217]

Three external factors, combined with the above assumptions, also alter threat perceptions. Ideological solidarity can lead states to temporary tactical alignments, but security considerations usually trump ideological preferences. Often ideology-based alliances falter when security interests differ; alternatively, ideological differences do not stop alignments if there is a greater threat on the horizon. The ideological difference between Israel and Saudi Arabia didn't stop them from aligning against the common threat, Iran, especially during the time when under Ahmadinejad, Iran was promoting Shia militias in Iraq as well as concentrating on nuclear weapons development.[218] Likewise, in the case of Russia, as per the theory, neither ideological differences nor similarities would have much influence, as long as other territorial, security, or economic interests are in play. Open societies invite more transnational penetration from their rival powers than closed societies and great powers feel threatened with more transnational penetration, especially foreign propaganda, which they think is detrimental to their stability. In Russia's case, if Russia's neighbor leans more toward NATO, it would result in Russian threat perceptions increasing, and that concern will be reflected in Russian official records. Russian policymakers will be worried about Western penetration and propaganda in Russian society, and measures will be taken to counter it. There will be evidence of Russian actions against what Russia might consider as agents of penetration. Finally, revolutions are key external events that influence and heighten the security dilemma and threat perception of a neighboring state or great power. In two different ways, again depending on other external factors, all else being equal, a revolution can straightaway invite aggression from a neighboring state or power that was previously aligned to the toppled regime, or otherwise it can instigate a prolonged security dilemma, spiral of conflict, and confrontation. The theory will be supported if there is heightened security competition between Russia and NATO, and it leads to a conflict, with the Russian *casus belli* indicating that Russian actions were taken either to preempt or to prevent the perceived threat from growing. Alternatively, in a similar situation, if one of the factors that leads to increased threat perceptions listed above is absent, and that did not lead Russia to decide the situation to be threatening enough to warrant a conflict, that would support the theory, as well.

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CASE SELECTION

That leads us to a selection of cases to explore the theory. I chose to explore three historical cases—namely Russia-NATO relations, Russia-Ukraine

relations, and Russian-Georgia relations—and analyze, for each case, the different phases of cooperation and balancing. In each of these cases, I will study when Russia balanced against each of these actors, and when Russia cooperated. Then I will explore whether the theory and hypotheses presented in the following chapter match the evidence.

The reasons for choosing these particular cases are as follows. To test the hypotheses presented in this chapter, there was a need to find cases that would meet two qualifications. One, they should be regarded as strategic threats by Russia, whether it is an individual state or an alliance. Two, Russia must have displayed phases of both cooperative and antagonistic behaviors toward these threats in the last twenty years. Ukraine and Georgia are two countries with which Russia displayed both cooperative and antagonistic behavior. They are both considered part of Russia's traditional sphere of influence, and both underwent tumultuous color revolutions in which the old guard were toppled. Russia has also committed aggression and waged war against Georgia and dissected and annexed part of Ukraine and is currently engaged in active destabilization of the region by means of a proxy war. NATO, on the other hand, is not a great power or a country, but an alliance led by great powers. The reason to choose NATO and not the United States is simple: It avoids the question of selection bias. The Balance of Threat theory suggests that a great power reacts to sources of threat, which could be either another great power or an alliance. While NATO is led by the United States, it is a multinational alliance, and it has been expanding ever closer to Russian territory, which allows us to explore whether Russian cooperation and antagonism toward NATO fulfills the assumptions mentioned above.

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This leaves us with China as the only other great power that could have been used as a case. Both United States and China are two predominant powers of the globe. Nonetheless, despite the Sino-Soviet history of competition and rivalry, Russia has not shown much antagonistic behavior toward China in the last twenty years. That could be for several different reasons. Maybe Russia perceives that Chinese offensive power is not targeted toward Russia, or that China lacks offensive intentions toward Russia. Maybe it is because Chinese foreign investment in Russia is paramount, or that Russia seeks tactical alignment with China as a counterbalance to the United States, especially since the Iraq intervention, which Russia considers to be a sign of American global hegemonic aspirations. These are important questions to ponder for further research; nonetheless, it leaves out China as a case to study further, given the scope.

Walt's theory suggests that states will balance against threat. In each of the cases, Russia should balance against threats. Walt's theory also suggests that the decrease in the perceived threat, due to a lack of any of the variables, or the neutralization of the threat, would result in a return to the status

quo. Russia, accordingly, should therefore visibly display an instinct toward upholding or returning to status quo. As John Mearsheimer pointed out, regardless of the intention of the West (NATO/the United States), ultimately "it is the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them."[219]

As per the general hypothesis, Russian relations with NATO are supposed to reflect Russian relative military inferiority, and that would be reflected in Russian decision-making and policies. According to Walt's theory, if Russian policymakers realized they were weak and helpless with regard to NATO expansion in central Europe, or NATO intervention in Kosovo, that would be reflected in Russian decision-making. Being a comparatively weaker power, there could be two different possible reasons of muted Russian response in both of these situations. Russia could calculate that NATO expansions in central Europe either did not involve offensive capabilities, like the positioning of permanent troops or weapons systems, which would threaten the balance of power and territorial integrity, or did not involve any offensive weapons on the part of NATO. Either way, Russian policy documents, speeches, public debates, and papers would reflect such concerns. Similar documents during Russian NATO cooperation, both before and during the Afghanistan campaign, would be studied to see if Russian policymakers had bandwagoned with NATO because they calculated that NATO forces did not have any offensive intention in the Russian neighborhood. Incremental expansion of NATO toward the East, however, would result in incremental change in threat perceptions. If the difference in Russian behavior in similar circumstances can be explained by the absence of any assumption listed above, the theory will be supported.

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Ukraine and Georgia will be studied separately. Russian relations with Georgia and Ukraine, before and after the color revolutions, will be studied, especially during the buildup to the Georgian war, as well as the buildup to the Ukrainian crisis, that would reflect in Russian threat perceptions. Russian military doctrines as well as policy briefs would reflect that change in the threat quotient. The theory will be considered supported if, during the buildup phase of both crises, there is evidence of Russian actions that might be considered the cultivation of an alliance with the prerevolutionary regimes. Similarly, the theory will be considered supported if Russia, fearful of post-revolutionary Georgia moving away toward NATO, intervenes in Georgia by either a preemptive war, to stop Georgia's move toward NATO, or by a strategic operation in creating a buffer zone in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia and Ukraine are not great powers. By definition they are not supposed to pose any strategic threat to Russia on their own. Per Walt's theory, therefore, Russia will only feel threatened if Georgia or Ukraine turns to be a source of threat. But both the countries can

be considered sources of threat if they align with adversarial great powers or alliances, if they have increasing offensive power or offensive intentions vis-à-vis Russia, or if and when there is a revolution that subverts the domestic order, topples the friendly regime, and invites adversarial powers to get involved as a counterbalance to Russia. These threats should be reflected in Russian policy documents and public debates, as well as military doctrines.

To sum up, here are some hypotheses that are explored in light of the theory in the following chapters.

1. Higher aggregate power in a perceived strategic threat will alter threat perception in Russia, leading to internal balancing, like an arms race, or external balancing, in alliance behavior. That will reflect in the debates within Russian policymaking circles as well as Russian actions.
2. The Russian state, regardless of regime type and era, might feel threatened by any power or coalition with overall greater aggregate power than Russia. That would include great powers, alliances, and coalitions. Russia would balance against those threats.
3. The threat perception will incrementally increase if the source of threat moves closer to the Russian landmass and decrease if it moves away. The threat perception will also rise if offensive power increases and will decrease if offensive power is replaced by defensive powers. These changes will be acknowledged by Russian policymakers, and there should be a record and reflection of that in debates and discussions.
4. A geographically closer threat, with increased or increasing aggregate power, will result in greater concern and an elevated threat perception in a state or great power, which will influence its balancing or bandwagoning behavior accordingly. Russia's reaction to NATO expansion will be explored, to see if the causal variables are present in the events of a forceful reaction, or if one or more of them is absent in the instances of a muted reaction.
5. Finally, any altered security dynamic that threatens Russia's privileged position in its neighborhood would result in Moscow's balancing behavior, and even the use of military force, in extreme. Alternatively, the perceived threat, when neutralized or balanced, would result in Moscow moving back to the status quo. This would also prove that Russia acts as a security maximiser, and not a power maximiser—or, in other words, that Moscow is a status-quo and defensive realist power, and not a revanchist offensive realist power.

In sum, the book explains Russian reaction, and its balancing to threats, in the following cases. If NATO expands, Russia will feel threatened. If it reacts per the theory, and if Russian balancing increases with each NATO expansion,

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then the theory is supported. Alternatively, if the Russian reaction is muted during phases of NATO expansion, in the absence of any causal variable, then the theory is supported. Likewise, Russia should not ideally feel threatened and react to either Georgia or Ukraine. But if Russia reacts to the color revolutions, or any Georgian or Ukrainian push toward further integration with NATO, then the theory is supported. Alternatively, if Russian reaction is muted, even in the scenario of a westward push by Ukraine and Georgia, in the absence of any causal variable, then the theory is supported. Exploring each of these cases individually will help us understand if Russia behaves per the tenets of the Balance of Threat theory, and therefore acts as a classic realist great power.

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NOTES

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6. D. Trenin (2006), op. cit., 85/4: 87–96; and J. Berryman (2012), 'Geopolitics and Russian foreign policy,' *International Politics*, 49/4: 530–44.

7. See, for example, M. McFaul (2018), *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt); M. McKew (2017, January 1), 'Putin's Real Long Game,' *Politico*; M. McFaul (2007, September), 'Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution,' *International Security*, 32/2; K. Stoner, and M. McFaul (2015), 'Who lost Russia (this time)?' *Washington Quarterly*, 38/2: 167–87; K. Marten (2015), 'Putin's choices: explaining Russian foreign policy and intervention in Ukraine,' *Washington Quarterly*, 38/2: 189–204.

8. See C. Clover (2016), op. cit.; T. Snyder (2018), op. cit.; B. Lo (2015), *Russia and the New World Disorder* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press); A.P. Tsygankov (2012), op. cit.; A.L. Clunan (2009), *The Social Construction of Russia's*

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13. P. Kubicek (1999), 'Russian foreign policy and the West,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 114/4: 547–68; C. Thorun (2009), *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct Towards the West* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); A.P. Tsygankov (2010), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (London: Rowman & Littlefield).

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17. "Liberal Westernizers," "Pragmatic Nationalists," and "Fundamentalist Nationalists," are from Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors*. See especially the chapter by Margot Light, 33–100. Jeffrey T. Checkel (1997), 107–15.

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25. See R.H. Donaldson (1999), op. cit.

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77. E. Finkel, and Y.M. Brudny (2012), 'Russia and the colour revolutions,' *Democratization* 19/1.

78. Also read A.E. Stent (2005), 'America and Russia: Paradoxes of Partnership,' in A.J. Motyl, B.A. Ruble, and L. Shevtsova (eds.), *Russia's Engagement with the West: Transformation and Integration in the Twenty first Century* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe).

79. For more on this, read L. Shevtsova (2015, April), "The Authoritarian Resurgence: 'Forward to the Past,'" in *Russia: Journal of Democracy*; and 'The Ukraine Crisis: Falling into Putin's Trap'(2014, March), *American Interest*. On the Putin Doctrine, see L. Shevtsova (2014, July), 'The Maidan and Beyond: The Russia Factor,' *Journal of Democracy* 25: 74–82, quoting an essay by foreign minister Sergei Lavrov (2013), "Russia's Foreign Policy Philosophy," and Vladimir Putin (2014, March 18), "Address by President of the Russian Federation," at http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts /6889. See also his September 2013 speech (in Russian) at www.rg.ru/2013/09 /19/ stenogramma-site.html. Also, from the same "Authoritarian Resurgence," Lyudmila Klimentjeva (2014, April 29), "Kremlin Plans to Toughen Control over Internet Providers—'Kommersant.'"

80. For a detailed discussion on what the Soviet Systema entails, read G. Arbatov (1992, July), "The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics" (Times Books).

81. A. Applebaum (2013, February), 'Putinism, the ideology,' *Strategic Updates* (LSE Ideas).

82. T. Nichols (2014, September), 'Russia's Leader Is Neither a Realist Nor a Nationalist,' *Federalist*.

83. For a detailed read, see M.I. Goldman (2008), *Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); and P.K. Baey (2006), *Russian Energy Policy and Military Power: Putin's Quest for Greatness* (London: Routledge).

84. Case studies that corroborate this chain of analysis are the Ukraine-Russia gas standoff, the interruption of deliveries in the South Caucasus, as well as Turkish-Russian relations. Detailed discussions on this "energy superiority strategy" can be found in I. Isakova (2006), op. cit.; J. Bugajski (2004), *Cold Peace: Russia's*

New Imperialism (Westport: Praeger); S. Rosefielde (2005), *Russia in the 21st Century: The Prodigal Superpower* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); P.K. Baey (2006), *Russian Energy Policy and Military Power: Putin's Quest for Greatness* (Contemporary Security Studies).

85. P. Felgenhauer, 'Budgetary Fight in Moscow Sends US-Russian Relations into Deep Crisis,' *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 13/161.

86. M. Gault (2016, February), 'Is the Syrian war partly an ad for Russia's arms industry?' Reuters Blog Podcast; S.L. Myers, and E. Schmitt (2015, October), 'Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice,' *New York Times*.

87. I. Oldberg (2010), 'Russia's great power strategy under Putin and Medvedev,' Research monograph, Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

88. R. Sakwa (2008), op. cit.; D. Trenin (2006), op. cit.; D. Trenin (2007), op. cit.; D. Trenin (2009), 'Russia Reborn-Reimagining Moscow's Foreign Policy,' *Foreign Affairs*, 88: 64.

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89. H.E. Hale (2006), 'Democracy or autocracy on the march? The colored revolutions as normal dynamics of patronal Presidentialism,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 39/3: 305–29; T. Ambrosio (2007), 'Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends,' *Democratization*, 14/2: 232–52.

90. The Putin strategy is to divide Europe over missile defense. C.f. P. Stephens (2007, April 12), 'Russia's new national security strategy: familiar themes, gaudy rhetoric,' *Financial Times*; M. Galeotti (2016, January), 'Russia's Strategy: looking scarier than you think,' *War on the Rocks*.

91. F. Lukyanov (2012), 'Uncertain World: Putin the Realist, Medvedev the Liberal' [Online], in Sputnik International, 2012. Also K. Barysch (2007), 'Russia, realism and EU unity,' Center for European Reform. Earlier, accusations of Russian meddling and using oil as a weapon of blackmail under Putin was made by both vice president of the United States Dick Cheney and former Czech president Vaclav Havel, c.f. 'Russia is blackmailing Europe over energy, says Cheney [Online], in *Guardian* (2006).

92. Mearsheimer's thesis is the first attempt to explain the variation of Russian behavior from a theoretical perspective, from Putin's first two terms to the current, more aggressive avatar. Mearsheimer (2014, September/October) first wrote this thesis in 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault,' *Foreign Affairs*, 93/5: 1–12; and then again in a reply to Michael McFaul's rebuttal of his earlier piece, in a separate rejoinder entitled "Moscow's Choice" (2014, November/December), *Foreign Affairs*, 93/6: 167–71.

93. E. Götz (2015), 'It's geopolitics, stupid: explaining Russia's Ukraine policy,' *Global Affairs*, 1:1, 3–10.

94. T. Bukkvoll (2016), 'Why Putin went to war: ideology, interests and decision-making in the Russian use of force in Crimea and Donbas,' *Contemporary Politics*.

95. F. Lukyanov (2016), 'Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place,' *Foreign Affairs*, 95:30.

96. A. Arbatov (2014, 24 September), 'Collapse of the World Order?' *Russia in Global Affairs*.

97. S. Karaganov (2016, 1 August), 'How the World Looks From the Russian Perspective,' *Russia in Global Affairs*.

98. R. Legvold (2014, July/August), 'Managing the New Cold War,' *Foreign Affairs*.

99. 'An evolving and assertive Russia; a future threat or opportunity for Europe and America?' Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, http://www.da.mod.uk/Publications/category/91/an-evolving-and-assertive-russia-a-future-threat-or-opportunity-for-europe-and-america-15705.

100. J. Bew (2015, 15 December), 'The Syrian War and the return of great power politics,' *New Statesman*.

101. M. Zygar (2016, 9 December), 'The Russian Reset that never was,' *Foreign Policy*.

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102. S. Lavrov (2016, March 3), "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background," *Russia in Global Affairs*.

103. S. Maitra (2016, 6 April), 'The Deceptively Romantic Historical Musings of the Russian Foreign Minister,' *War on the Rocks*, http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/the-deceptively-romantic-historical-musings-of-the-russian-foreign-minister/.

104. N. Petro (2015), 'Russia's Orthodox Soft Power,' US Global Engagement, Carnegie Council report; M. Dal Santo (2016), 'The real Trump-Putin connection,' Lowy Institute.

105. J. Rovner (2015, 14 September), 'Searching for strategy in Putin's Russia'; 'Dealing with Putin's strategic incompetence' (2015, August 12), *War on the Rocks*.

106. 'Vladimir Putin Just Wants to Be Friends,' exclusive interview (2016, September 8), *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

107. J. Bew (2015, December 15), 'The Syrian War and the return of great power politics,' *New Statesman*; R. Legvold (2014, July/August), op. cit.

108. N.K. Gvosdev (2016), 'Is Russia Really Winning in Syria and Ukraine?' *National Interest*; E. Ashford (2016), "Is Russia Really 'Winning'?" *National Interest*.

109. Ibid.

110. B. Nicolas (2016), "Russia's 'militarization' of colour revolutions," *Policy Perspectives*, 4/2.

111. V. Danilovic (2002), *When the Stakes Are High—Deterrence and Conflict among Major Powers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 27, 255–28.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. As recently as 2014, US president Barack Obama claimed that Russia is "at best" a regional power and not a great power, per se. While some may wonder if a great power is still not a global power but a regional power, the reasons Russia is granted as a great power are discussed for the purpose of this project. (Further discussions that corroborate Russia's great power status may include J. Nixey [2015, December 21], 'Is Russia still a key world power?' Russia and Eurasia program head, Chatham House, BBC News; and D. Trenin [2014], 'Russia's great-power problem,' *National Interest.*) There might be a cause of argument that the Austro-Hungarian

empire, by that logic, was not a great power, as it was powerful only within Europe. That argument is flawed. The fact that the Austro-Hungarian empire was influential inside Europe, which at that point of time included colonial powers that covered most of the globe, and those same powers could not afford to form any balancing coalition within Europe without keeping the Austro-Hungarian empire in mind, proves beyond doubt how much influence it wielded within the continent. Regardless of the spatial dimension, one can safely argue that the Austro-Hungarian empire was a great power. For further reading, see W.R. Mead (2015, January 4), 'The Seven Great Powers,' *American Interest*. Also A.J.P. Taylor (1954), *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918*, The Oxford History of Modern Europe, OUP; Stephen D. Kertesz, and M.A. Fitzsimons (eds.) (1959), *Diplomacy in a Changing World* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press); and Iggers and von Moltke (1973), *In the Theory and Practice of History* (Bobbs-Merril).

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115. First, Morgenthau regarded states as the key actors in the world. Second, the natural state of international politics is anarchic, which lays emphasis on the lack of hierarchy of the system. Morgenthau acknowledges treaties and institutions but is skeptical of their overall power. Third, states try to achieve and increase power. Fourth, in this seeking of power, states act as organic beings, which is essentially a reflection of human nature. Fifth, in the pursuit of security or power, states usually act rationally. Sixth, states also use force, or intend to use force as an important tool of statehood. See H.J. Morgenthau (1978), *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 4–15.

116. K.N. Waltz (1979), "Theory of International Politics," chapter 1.

117. Hans J. Morgenthau (1978), op. cit. (Neorealism adopts the basic tenets from classical realism, the anarchic nature and states being the primary actors. But classical realism is not the framework adopted for the project. For further detailed discussion on the tenets of classical realism, please refer to R.G. Gilpin (1984, Spring), 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism,' *International Organization* 38/2: 287–304.

118. See J. Vasquez, and C. Elman (eds.) (2002), *Realism and the balancing of power: A New Debate* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall); C. Elman, and M.F. Elman (eds.) (2003), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge: MIT Press).

119. K.N. Waltz (1979), op. cit.

120. Waltz, *Theory*, 91.

121. Ibid.

122. K.N. Waltz (2000), 'Structural realism after the Cold War,' *International Security*, 25/1: 5–41.

123. Gaddis deals extensively on why bipolarity was the stable, for reasons like American capitalism not being expansionist like imperialism, the advent of nuclear weapons, mutually assured destruction, and rules of superpowers understanding the importance of communication. See J.L. Gaddis (1986), 'The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Post-War International System,' *International Security*, 10/4: 99–142.

124. Waltz, *Theory*, chapter 3.

125. Ibid., 93.

126. J.J. Mearsheimer (2009, June), "Reckless States and Realism," *International Relations*, Vol. 23, no. 2: 241–56.

127. A further detailed discussion of this point is found in "The Fate of Nations: The Search for National Security in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" by Michael Mandelbaum, where it is explained why "two states that are similarly situated in the system but have different domestic orders will tend to pursue similar security policies." The behavior of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War was therefore decided more by the fact that each was a superpower in a bipolar structure than by the fact that one was democratic and the other was communist. Ideology mattered less, according to Mandelbaum, and the system mattered more. Waltz himself contributed on this point, predicting the behavior of Iran during the debate on whether they should be having a nuclear bomb, and how it might affect their state behavior. Waltz's point was that the state behavior wouldn't change much, and Iran would, much like Mao's China, be a responsible stakeholder in the international community.

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128. Ibid.

129. K.N. Waltz (2008), *Realism and International Politics* (London: Routledge).

130. A. Freyberg-Inan, E. Harrison, and J. Patrick (eds.) (2009), *Rethinking Realism in International Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 29–30.

131. Waltz, *Reflections*, 330; Waltz, *Theory*, 92, 118.

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.

135. Waltz, *Theory*, 105–07.

136. Ibid., 126.

137. "Realists believe that: (1) the state is the primary actor in world politics; (2) stares weigh options and make policy decisions in a more-or-less rational (3) security is the fundamental aim of states; and (4) power, especially military power, is the most important factor shaping international political life. Most Realists' argue that systemic forces (e.g., relative power) exert a greater influence on state than unit-level factors do, but no Realist maintains that unit-level factors exert no influence at all. In fact, Realists disagree on how much attention should be paid to or unit-level factors. . . . Most importantly, Realism does not prescribe any particular strategy or national policy. Because Realists believe that the external environment heavily shapes the foreign policies of states, their policy prescriptions must rest on an assessment of the situation facing a given state at a particular point in time" (S.M. Walt [1992], 'Alliances, Threats, and U.S. Grand Strategy: A Reply to Kaufmann and Labs,' *Security Studies*, 1/3: 448–82), as quoted in A.M. Bock, and I. Henneberg (2013), "Why balancing fails theoretical reflections on Stephan M. Walt's 'Balance of Threat' Theory."

138. S. Walt (1985), 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,' *International Security* 9: 3–43.

139. An empirical example of this logic of states allying with other states, preferably lesser powers to balance against bigger threats, is exemplified by England with France against the Germany and Austrian empires (the rising hegemons) and the United States' rapprochement with China during the Sino-Soviet split. Also, see Waltz (1979), 118–21.

140. S. Walt (1985), 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,' *International Security* 9: 3–43.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. "A security dilemma broadly refers to a scenario wherein when two or more states each feel insecure in relation to other states, as a result, they are engaged in unintended provocations, which result in an escalation of the conflict." See O. Kanji (2003), 'Security,' in G. Burgess, and H. Burgess (eds.), *Beyond Intractability*, Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado. Also "A structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening" (J. Herz [1950], 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,' *World Politics* 2/2: 171–201, esp. at 157. The "Dilemma" is because no state desires the escalation, per R. Jervis (1978), 'Cooperation under the security dilemma,' *World Politics* 30/2: 167–74; and R. Jervis (1978 [b]), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 58–113.

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144. R. Jervis (1978 [2]), 63.

145. Ibid.

146. The spiral model and the deterrence model are both worthy explanations for conflict in defensive realism. The spiral model is used mostly in defensive realism, and the deterrence model is more in line with offensive realism. The drawback of the deterrence model is that it assumes states are revisionist and power maximizing, and conflict happens when deterrence breaks down, whereas the spiral model is more in line with the security-maximizing role of a state. At this stage, I leave this discussion with a basic introduction of both the models, as it is not possible for me to claim Russia is a revisionist offensive realist state or a defensive realist state, which will only become clear with further enquiry and empirical evidence. For further detailed discussion on these models, please refer to R. Jervis (1976), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), chapter 3.

147. David L. Rousseau, *Relative or Absolute Gains: Beliefs and Behavior in International Politics*. It is accepted that cooperation is rare in an international system characterized by anarchy. "Carr 1939; Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979; 4 Mearsheimer 1994/5"), "Grieco (1988a, 1888b, 1990) has challenged the institutional theorists by claiming that they have not adopted all the central assumptions of realism. That is, state leaders will accept any accord that makes the state better off regardless of the gain achieved by any other state. However, power is by definition a relative concept (Dahl 1957). According to realists, any increase in power by the Soviet Union during the Cold War translated into a decrease in the power of the United States. Grieco argues that concern over relative gains greatly restricts the number of possible agreements because all gains must be distributed in a manner that exactly preserves the pre-existing balance of power. Realists assume that state leaders are primarily concerned with relative gains; liberal institutionalists claim that under many, but certainly not all circumstances, state leaders focus on absolute gains."

148. Ibid.

149. "According to realists, states worry that today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy in war, and fear that achievements of joint gains that advantage a friend in the present might produce a more dangerous potential foe in the future. As a result states must give serious attention to the gains of partners (Grieco 1988a, 118; also see Waltz 1979, 105)."

150. "Powell (1991) argues that if the cost of using military force is low, concern over relative gains will be heightened. For example, in a world in which offensive technology dominates defensive technology, wars tend to be quick and cheap. Powell contends that leaders in this era become very sensitive to small shifts in relative power and therefore focus on relative gains. In contrast, in a defense dominant world the importance of relative gains should diminish." See R. Powell (1991), 'Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory,' *American Political Science Review* 85/ 4: 1303–20.

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151. This model gives us the relation between anarchy and cooperation, which are not mutually inconsistent. Rather, this model clarifies that anarchy makes cooperation difficult due to these two reasons: first, in a lack of hierarchy implementation of cooperation is difficult although not impossible, and second, the system gives states options if they would want to use their relative gains for their own benefits, or to do harm to the adversary. Read R. Powell (1991), ibid.

152. H.J. Morgenthau (1978), *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, fifth edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf); E.V. Gulick (1955), *Europe's Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (New York: Norton), 187–89.

153. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, chapter 14; Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, chapter 1.

154. For further details on writings of what constitutes balancing behavior, please see S. Walt (1990), *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 18–20.

155. Gulick, 60.

156. Michael J. Sheehan (1996), *The Balance of Power: History and Theory* (Taylor & Francis, Political Science).

157. John J. Mearsheimer (2009, June), "Reckless States and Realism," *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 241–56.

158. See S.M. Walt (1990), ibid.

159. Ibid.

160. W. Churchill (1948), *The Gathering Storm*, vol. I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 207.

161. H. Kissinger (1979), *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company).

162. Walt quotes Churchill and Kissinger, both advocating the support for the weaker of the powers in a triangular balancing (*Origin*, 19).

163. Waltz, '*Reflections*,' 330; Waltz, *Theory*, 92, 118.

164. Ibid.

165. Waltz, 'Why Iran should get the bomb?' *Foreign Affairs*; N.P. Monteiro (2011/2012), 'Unrest assured: Why unipolarity is not peaceful,' *International Security* 36/3: 9–40.

166. S.M. Walt (2003), 'Alliances: Balancing and Bandwagoning,' in R.J. Art, and R. Jervis (eds.), *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, sixth edition (New York: Longman), 111.
167. Waltz, *Theory*, 67–73, 121–22.
168. J.J. Mearsheimer (2001), *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton).
169. For a detailed discussion, see E.J. Labs (1997), 'Beyond victory: Offensive realism and the expansion of war aims,' *Security Studies*, 6/4: 1–49.
170. S.M. Walt (2003), op. cit., 111.
171. S.M. Walt, *Origin of Alliances, Part 1: Explaining Alliance Formations, Balancing Behavior*, 10.
172. Ibid., 32.
173. Ibid.
174. Ibid., 28–29.
175. Ibid., 22–23.
176. Ibid.
177. Ibid.
178. Ibid.
179. Ibid., 24.
180. Ibid.
181. Ibid.
182. Ibid., 24–25.
183. Ibid.
184. Ibid.
185. Ibid., 28–29.
186. Ibid.
187. Ibid., 27.
188. Ibid., 35–49.
189. Ibid., 32.
190. Ibid., 35–49.
191. Ibid., 37.
192. Ibid., 36.
193. Ibid., 37.
194. Ibid., 46.
195. Ibid.
196. S.M. Walt (1985), 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,' *International Security* 9/4: 3–43; S.M. Walt (1987), op. cit.
197. S.M. Walt, *Revolution and War*, Chapter 2: "A theory of revolution of war," 18.
198. Ibid.
199. S.M. Walt (1992), "Revolution and War," *World Politics*, 44: 321–68; S.M. Walt (1996a), *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
200. E.H. Carr (1961), *What Is History?* (London: Penguin).
201. E. Bennett et al. (2007, 2 February), 'Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield,' *Comparative Political Studies* 40/2.
202. Ibid.

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203. J. Snyder (1988), 'Science and Sovietology: Bridging the Methods Gap in Soviet Foreign Policy Studies,' *World Politics*, 40/2: 169–93.

204. E. Bennett et al. (2007), op. cit.

205. J.J. Mearsheimer, and S.M. Walt (2013), 'Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing Is Bad for International Relations,' *European Journal of International Relations* 19/3: 427–57.

206. Ibid.

207. J. Snyder (1984/1985), 'Richness, Rigor, and Relevance in the Study of Soviet Foreign Policy,' *International Security*, 9/3: 89–108; J. Snyder (1988, January), op. cit., 169–93.

208. J.J. Mearsheimer, and S.M. Walt (2013), 'Leaving Theory Behind: Why Simplistic Hypothesis Testing Is Bad for International Relations,' *European Journal of International Relations* 19/3: 427–57.

209. Ibid.

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210. J. Snyder (1984/1985), 89–108.

211. Elman Bennett et al. (2007), op cit.

212. S.M. Walt (1988), 'Testing theories of alliance formation: the case of Southwest Asia,' *International Organization*, 42: 275–316.

213. See Salvathan et al. (2015), 'Iran and Saudi Arabia: the dilemma of security, the balance of threat,' *Journal of Scientific Research and Development* 2/2: 141–49; and F. Gause (2003), 'Balancing what? Threat perception and alliance choice in the gulf,' *Security Studies* 13/2: 273–305

214. A.M. Bock, I. Henneberg, and F. Plank (2015), "'If you compress the spring, it will snap back hard': The Ukrainian crisis and the balance of threat theory," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 70/1.

215. Salavatian et al. (2015), op. cit.

216. Ibid.

217. Henneberg, Plank, Bock et al. (2014, 18 December), 'The Ukrainian crisis and the balance of threat theory,' *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*.

218. Hossein, Salavatian et al. (2015), op. cit.

219. J.J. Mearsheimer. (2014), 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault. The liberal delusions that provoked Putin,' *Foreign Affairs*, 93/5.

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Chapter 2

Russian Balancing against NATO

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The enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since the collapse of the Soviet Union remained a major issue between Russia and the West. As recently as 2015, Russian president Vladimir Putin tied Russia's annexation of Crimea to NATO's expansion in former Soviet spheres of influence.[1] Neorealist theories dictate that Russian behavior would be determined by structural forces, like military balance, power, and territorial factors, more than values and ideology. Accordingly, Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory was chosen as a theoretical framework to test whether Russia behaves as a realist great power. In the previous chapter, I highlighted a set of hypotheses.

First, higher aggregate power in states of alliances considered adversarial by Russia would cause Russia to perceive a higher level of threat. That would result in balancing behavior by Russia, which could be either internal balancing, like arms buildup, strategic changes, force positioning, or alliance behavior. Second, the Russian state, regardless of regime type or era, will feel threatened by any power or coalition with an overall aggregate power greater than Russia, a threat perception that will incrementally increase as the source of threat moves geographically closer to Russia. Third, the threat perception of Russia will also rise if offensive capability or offensive intention of the adversarial coalition increases, and it will decrease if Russia perceives a lack of offensive capability or intention. The changes of such perception will be reflected in Russian policy debates, as well as in speeches by political and military leaders. These set of hypotheses would be tested in three phases of NATO enlargement. The first phase occurred when central European countries, which were once part of the Warsaw Pact but not part of the Soviet Union, joined NATO. The second phase occurred when East European countries, as well as some former Soviet states, joined NATO, and the final phase took place when NATO decided to invite Ukraine and Georgia to join the alliance. Russian reaction in each of these phases will be explored.

The Balance of Threat theory implies Russian relations with NATO should reflect Russian relative military inferiority, which will be evident in strategy documents, as well as public speeches by military and political elites. Both Russian political and military elite, will be, by default, opposed to NATO enlargement. If NATO expands, Russia will feel threatened. If it reacts as per the theory, if Russian balancing increases with each NATO expansion, then the theory is supported. Alternatively, if the Russian reaction is muted during phases of NATO expansion, in the absence of any causal variable, then the theory is also supported. The Russian reaction to NATO enlargement or NATO's capability would, therefore, follow the hypothesis in the following way. One, it will be reliant on the perceived source of a threat moving closer to Russia, and the Russian reaction would continue to be more and more aggressive with each phase of NATO enlargement. Two, the Russian reaction to NATO's increased offensive capability would result in increased aggressive posturing from the Russian side. Three, if Russia perceives NATO has an offensive intention, there would be balancing behavior evident from the Russian side. Alternatively, if Russia does not act aggressively with each phase of expansion, there would be an absence of either offensive capability or perceived offensive intention from NATO's side. Either way, there would be documented evidence of Russian actions and justifications, in official political and military speeches and strategic literature. It is difficult to judge the behavior of Russia in isolation without understanding the whole strategic reality, which is why this study intends to use three separate cases to test the idea that Russia acts according to the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory. The picture will be clearer after exploring Russian behavior with Ukraine and Georgia. This chapter provides one piece of the puzzle, the Russian reaction to NATO enlargement.

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In this chapter, a brief history of NATO enlargement is given, key Russian interests are explored, and a detailed study of NATO enlargement, in three phases follows. The section on the push for NATO enlargement helps in explaining the broad ideas and justifications behind NATO enlargement from the Western side, which in turn helps in further understanding Russian perception of the enlargement. Key differences of opinions, semantics, and definitions also become prominent in this section, which forms the baseline of studying Russian reactions in the phases of NATO's enlargement, and the sources of Russian insecurity regarding NATO. In each phase of enlargement, the events would be explored briefly, followed by Russian political reactions, military and political statements, relevant documents, and speeches, to see if Russian behavior is influenced as per the above-mentioned hypotheses, followed by a summation. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this chapter itself is just one part of the three case studies explored here, which,

together with the other cases, helps us understand whether Russia acts according to the dictates of neorealism, and the Balance of Threat theory.

The Push for NATO Enlargement

This section, charting the brief history of this period, between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first phase of NATO enlargement, is important, as it gives a baseline to understand subsequent Russian understanding of the process. It also helps us understand that the process of NATO enlargement, from the Western side, was an ideological as well as a strategic choice, whereas from the Russian side, it was perceived as purely strategic and territorial expansion. It also highlights that the Russian perception of NATO expansion remains colored, as it starts from what Russia perceives to be a betrayal, a territorial expansion, aimed at balancing Russia. This section also highlights why the words *NATO expansion* and *enlargement* are used interchangeably. From the Western perspective, it was an *enlargement*, which was decided after careful debate and implied agency and choice to the Central and Eastern European states. From the Russian perspective, it was an *expansion*, for strategic and territorial reasons.

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American Debate over NATO

Russian opposition to NATO expansion had been a constant source of animosity, even when the intensity fluctuated. These tensions are more than policy disputes, as they reflect opposing worldviews. The Russian geopolitical perspective is different from the Western ideological lens or liberal internationalism and liberal institutionalism, and as a result Russia views NATO through the lens of a strategic adversary in European security.[2] As Dmitry Trenin wrote, the Russian view of Europe remains steeped in geopolitics and great power rivalry, even when the European lens changed to a more liberal internationalism. Russia refuses to accept the continued hegemony of the United States. And this is the key difference of Russia from other European powers.[3]

The Western debate over NATO was highly contested. George F. Kennan said in February 1997 that it was the "most fateful error of American policy in the entire post–cold-war era."[4] The warning was repeated in 2014, when John Mearsheimer debated the reaction of Russia and the Russian annexation of Crimea as a direct response to NATO expansion in the East.[5] Scholarly opinion is divided on whether there was a no-expansion pledge from NATO, or whether it was a serious miscommunication and misinterpretation on both sides.[6] According to the latest declassified documents, there were a series of verbal assurances and pledges from the Western side to Mikhail Gorbachev.[7] US secretary of state James Baker assured "not one

inch eastward" to Gorbachev, on February 9, 1990, alongside other series of assurances. Baker went on to assure Gorbachev that Soviet territorial interests would be kept in mind, and if Gorbachev wanted, then a united Germany would be outside NATO without any US troops present.[8] Assurances from Western leaders on NATO began on January 31, 1990, with West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher making clear that "that the changes in Eastern Europe and the German unification process must not lead to an "impairment of Soviet security interests.'[9] And ruling out NATO 'expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e., moving it closer to the Soviet borders.' NATO secretary-general Manfred Wörner stated that the alliance was not looking to any shift of balance or extending military borders to the east.[10] This pledge was repeated subsequently by Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher, James Baker, Douglas Hurd, Francois Mitterrand, and George H.W. Bush. Margaret Thatcher said to Gorbachev in NATO's London summit in 1990, 'We must find ways to give the Soviet Union confidence that its security would be assured. . . . CSCE could be an umbrella for all this, as well as being the forum which brought the Soviet Union fully into discussion about the future of Europe,' a pledge repeated by President Bush, and subsequently by British Prime Minister John Major, who personally assured Gorbachev, as late as in March 1991, 'We are not talking about the strengthening of NATO.' Subsequently, when asked by Soviet defense minister Marshal Dmitri Yazov about East European leaders" interest in NATO membership, he repeated, "Nothing of the sort will happen."[11] In sum, during the final days of the Cold War, as well as in the first few years after the Soviet collapse, Russia was under the impression that there was a Western pledge of no territorial enlargement of NATO toward Russian borders, which would alter the strategic balance in Europe.

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European Debate about NATO

In Europe, the debate about NATO expansion was mixed. The reunification of Germany was followed by relative calm, and questions about the future of NATO was not debated much in the United States during the last two years of George H.W. Bush's presidency. The initial push came from the Central European countries who were skeptical of Russia's influence, around June 1990.[12] Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia reached a joint strategy known as the Visegrad Process, in response to Moscow's economic pressure to sign bilateral agreements of future security arrangements. Soviet deputy foreign minister Yulii Kvitinskii proposed a backdoor arrangement that pushed the Central Europeans under a Russian security umbrella, known as the Kvitinskii clause, and it was thoroughly rejected by the Central Europeans countries, even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, highlighting

Moscow's relative loss of coercive power.[13] By November 1990, the Soviet press started to report that Hungary was willing to join NATO, and by early 1991, Moscow seemed resigned to the idea that all Visegrad countries shared the goal of joining NATO. By April 1991, Izvestia even proposed that Moscow itself might join NATO. By July 1991, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. NATO also extended an offer to Moscow to join the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), as US secretary James Baker suggested that NACC would be an important part of Russia's engagement with European security structures. From the Russian side, there were broad hints that Russia was willing to consider joining NATO as a long-term political goal.[14]

The Push for Enlargement

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From the Western side, the first hint of NATO enlargement came with secretary general Manfred Wörner's declaration in March 1992, that NATO's doors were open. NATO's enlargement policy was not a concerted effort initially, but it organically developed throughout the early 1990s and gained momentum under the presidency of Bill Clinton, whose administration tied it to the changing grand strategy of the United States. It was also a matter of serious debate within the US administration, the main driver of the expansion claim. While the Central and Eastern European states were wary of Russia and wanted to be under the security umbrella of NATO, they were rebuffed initially, for fear of the Russian reaction. It was not until Bill Clinton's presidency that this idea was mulled seriously in Washington.[15] In April 1993, Clinton met Lech Walesa of Poland, Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, and Arpad Goncz of Hungary, all of whom argued that NATO should expand. Clinton's foreign policy was predicated on the idea that peace was promoted with trade and a free market, and democracies rarely go to war with each other—otherwise known as the democratic peace theory.[16] NATO expansion and the spread of liberal institutions was, therefore, a means to this policy.

The idea of expansion was vigorously debated within the alliance.[17] Primary arguments made for expansion were that it would help communist states transition to democracy, enhance continent-wide security, and prevent a security vacuum in large swathes of territory and the rise of ethno-nationalist harmful elements.[18] While superficially sympathetic to Russia, NATO viewed expansion primarily as a security endeavor, and it was unwilling to let Russia have any say on the process.[19]

Further push for NATO expansion came from Germany, under German defense minister Volker Rühe. Rühe said that German stability would be threatened if its new eastern frontiers were not moved farther east.[20] In the United States, NSC speechwriter Jeremy Rosner, leading the NATO Enlargement Ratification Office, alongside secretary of state Madeleine Albright, lobbied

for Senate approval of NATO's geographic expansion, and coined the term *enlargement* as opposed to a more aggressive-sounding *expansion*.[21] The idea was, however, a territorial expansion and the spread of institutions and American support for democracy promotion, as opposed to a narrower Cold War–era idea of containment.[22]

The opposition to this Clintonian NATO expansion came from certain circles. The Pentagon was opposed to NATO expansion, and it supported the Partnership for Peace to allay any Russian fears that would arise. Strobe Talbott, then-advisor to the secretary of state, cautioned, "The key principle, as I see it, is this . . . An expanded NATO that excludes Russia will not serve to contain Russia's retrograde, expansionist impulses; quite the contrary, it will further provoke them."[23] The idea that Russia would inevitably be provoked by territorial enlargement was also furthered in academic arguments.[24] Nevertheless, the Clinton administration was committed to expand NATO and democratic peace.[25] In January 1994, Clinton stated in a speech in Prague that "The question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members, but when and how."[26] It was followed by Clinton's speech in Poland, calling PFP "a first step toward expansion of NATO." By 1995, the process was inevitable.[27] There are scholarly disagreements on this pledge on two accounts. One, the pledge was made to the Soviet Union, which disappeared, and there were no similar promises, whether written or verbal, to Russia, and those promises would be invalid as they are not codified in a treaty and therefore are not legally binding.[28] It was also stated that none of these pledges or promises were made with regard to Central European countries specifically and only pertained to NATO troops in East Germany.[29] Second, there were no actual pledges, but conciliatory statements open to interpretation.[30] NATO's argument was that the Central European states were free to choose their own alliances, a contingency that was not discussed during the German reunification talks.[31]

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Russian Perceptions of NATO's Intentions

There is significant evidence that Gorbachev went back to the Soviet Union during the final days of the USSR, assuring his countrymen and hardliners that there would be no expansion of NATO.[32] That was one of the pledges upon which the unification of Germany had been agreed. Archival and documentary evidence charting the speeches and memos of Western and Soviet leaders during the time period shows that Western leaders considered and rejected the Central and Eastern European membership of NATO and were satisfied with only German unification. The documents also reinforce the claim by several realist scholars, as well as CIA director Robert Gates's criticism, of pressing ahead with an expansion of NATO eastward during the

mid- to late-1990s, even when Russians were led to believe that the eventuality would never occur. The controversy regarding this issue subsequently rose several times when the Russian government, regardless of regime or leader, accused the West regarding NATO enlargement in 1997–1999, and again in 2001–2002, when NATO invited several countries to join, as well as in 2005 and in 2008. In September 2008, after Georgia and Ukraine were invited by NATO, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov insisted that in the 1990s, the United States had "made a commitment not to expand NATO" and had "repeatedly broken this commitment" in the years since. It can be argued that there is some truth in that, and that this idea of "betrayal," colors the Russian judgment of NATO.

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RUSSIAN REACTION TO THE FIRST PHASE OF NATO ENLARGEMENT

By December 1996, the North Atlantic Council meeting announced a summit in Madrid in July 1997, intending to set the course for the Alliance to move toward the twenty-first century, consolidating Euro-Atlantic security.[33] On December 10, 1996, NATO invited Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to apply for membership at the Madrid summit. The first phase of the enlargement process was expected to take two years to complete, and by 1999, NATO was ready for new members. Because of its size and its geostrategic location, Central Europe was strategically valuable for NATO.[34]

Russian reaction to NATO expansion is difficult to chart as they also occur in phases. Initially, neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin felt threatened by the NATO alliance, as first, both these leaders were under the impression that NATO was not expanding territorially, and both wanted to work with NATO, under the impression that NATO could provide some strategic stability in Europe, and second, both were under no illusion that the former Warsaw Pact countries were no longer under Moscow's direct command. A RAND Corporation study highlighted that Russia always considered the following five components to be its areas of interest:[35] defense of the territory, sphere of influence in the near abroad, Russian status as a great power, Russia's equal platform with other great powers, and Russian sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. Russian strategic ideas are partly shaped by Russian history, lack of natural boundaries and buffers, consistent foreign invasion, and interference in Russian domestic affairs by other great powers.[36] The consensus in Russian foreign-policy circles and elites is that NATO enlargement results in the diminishing security buffer between Russia and West and makes the defense of conclaves and strategic chokepoints like Kaliningrad difficult.[37] Russian defense minister Grachev, for example, did

not see a NATO expansion on the horizon, and the Russian military doctrine in 1993 was designed to foster an era of "partnership and cooperation," even though it mentioned the territorial enlargement of any alliance moving toward the Russian border as a potential military threat, in the future, should it ever happen.[38] Since 1994, Atlanticists and liberals, in the Western sense, have not acted as a unified political force within Russia.[39] The Russian ruling elite, as well as opposition, whether communist or ultra-nationalist, were consistently skeptical of NATO enlargement, as were the Russian military elite. Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) in 1993 also referred to NATO as the "biggest military grouping in the world that possesses an enormous offensive potential."[40] As late as 1994, there was no expectation in Russia that NATO was going to expand. At the end of 1993, Kozyrev confirmed to Russian lawmakers that "the greatest achievement of Russian foreign policy in 1993 was to prevent NATO's expansion eastward to our borders."[41] Moscow was surprised by the launch of the NATO enlargement study in 1995, prompting Yeltsin to declare that the Cold War had been replaced with "Cold Peace."[42] The democrats in Russia felt betrayed and disappointed.[43] Public opinion also turned against further Atlanticism.[44]

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Even though neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin felt threatened by NATO, they both made it clear that NATO expansion would be a constant source of animosity with the West. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin's comments in Belgium also mentioned that NATO's materiel and infrastructure in the former Soviet sphere would be a threat to Russian interests.[45] Therefore, even before there were any official statements from the United States about NATO expansion to the east, any territorial enlargement of an old alliance in the former Soviet sphere was regarded warily by Moscow, a sentiment that was openly conveyed to the West.[46] Yevgeny Primakov, at that time the director of foreign intelligence, said in November 1993 that any material and territorial expansion of NATO was dangerous for Russian interests, as Russia would then be compelled to redeploy troops to the West.[47]

The Russian military and political elite were somewhat cognizant of the Russian relative material inferiority compared to the Western alliance, immediately after the Cold War, and the resultant diminished stature. The addition of central European states only increased that gap in aggregate power. However, two concessions from NATO's side helped in allaying Russian fears. Russia participated in the Partnership for Peace in exchange for special status within the North Atlantic Council. The Partnership for Peace program meant there was a visible reduction of force posturing from the Western side. NATO's new security doctrine resulted in a substantial reduction of conventional as well as nuclear forces.[48] The forward presence of the United States was reduced from 325,000 to 100,000 troops, and European members cut their troops by more than 500,000. As Poland, Hungary, and

the Czech Republic were invited to join NATO, the land, sea, and air units were reduced by 30 to 40 percent, and 35 percent at readiness level compared to 1990. Theatre-level nuclear weapons were reduced by 80 percent. These reductions were clearly visible and denoted the lack of offensive power or intention on NATO's part.[49] Despite the rhetoric, therefore, there were conciliatory efforts from both sides.

The Russian foreign ministry's condition was that Moscow would agree to NATO enlargement in Central Europe as long as there were "no deployments of nuclear weapons or allied combat forces on the territory of new member states," both conditions agreed to by NATO.[50] Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov also considered the PFP to be damage limitation.[51] NATO's acceptance of the Russian conditions happened around the same time that Russia was also invited to join the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia and to endorse the Dayton accords.[52] The "NATO Russia Founding Act," signed by both parties in May 1997, led to the creation of the Permanent Joint Council (PJC), which allowed Russia to establish a mission at NATO. Yeltsin, in return, officially accepted the first round of NATO enlargement—to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—as inevitable, while making it clear that the Russia had strong opposition to NATO expansion to the Baltic countries, or the former borders of the Soviet Union. This new 'red line' was repeated throughout the remaining years of Yeltsin's presidency.[53]

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In sum, the visible Russian rhetorical posturing increased with NATO's eastward enlargement. But it could be argued that Russian reaction remained limited, due to the clear reduction of NATO's offensive capabilities, as well as a perceived lack of their clear offensive intentions.

RUSSIAN REACTION TO THE SECOND PHASE OF NATO ENLARGEMENT

The second phase of NATO enlargement started with the joining of more central European members, as well Baltic states that had formed the Soviet Union, to their membership in 2004, one year after the Iraq invasion. The period also saw the Russian strategic calculus change after the Kosovo war, as well as a change in Russian leadership. Even though Russian military doctrine started to reflect the changing dynamics, the Russian leadership showed flexibility in aligning with NATO after Kosovo and after the September 11, 2001, terror attack.

Tensions between Russia and NATO escalated again during the conflict of Kosovo, and Russia warned in the first PJC meeting against the unilateral use of force without authorization from the United Nations. NATO ignored the

warning, and the centerpiece of NATO's new relationship with Russia, the Permanent Joint Council, broke down during the war in Kosovo.[54] The war in Kosovo highlighted that NATO was not serious about Russian "consultation," nor was NATO unaware of Russia's diminished military clout.[55] Around the same time, another significant change happened, as NATO started to discuss the possibility of moving one of its headquarters from Rendsburg, Germany, to northern Poland—a stated red line for Russia and something NATO had explicitly promised not to do earlier.[56] The Russian defense minister, Igor Sergeev, in a trip to Rendsburg in 1998, warned that such a territorial move would lead to a military confrontation.[57] There was no military confrontation at the time of the move, but Russia suspended ties with NATO and withdrew its representatives from NATO headquarters in March 1999. Russia did return to the NATO table for talks within a few months, but with a clear interest that Russian troops remain part of peacekeeping efforts in the Balkans.[58] By the end of 1999, Boris Yeltsin had resigned, and Vladimir Putin was president.

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The Kosovo campaign triggered the debate within the Russian military and strategic planning community on NATO's hidden goals, and subsequently triggered Russian military doctrines to be adjusted to reflect its new defense policies.[59] For the first time since the Cold War, Russian strategic planners had to deal with the scenario of NATO forces projecting power, within a weakened Russian territory, in the name of human rights.[60] Around the same time, right after NATO enlargement in Central Europe, the Russian military updated Russia's military doctrine, which focused on Russian economic inferiority, the gap in military capabilities, and the need for a multipolar world. In 1993, Russia abandoned its no-first-use policy of nuclear weapons against an overwhelming conventional attack from a great power or alliance. That was continued in this new document.[61] NATO, on the other hand, maintained no change in its nuclear posture, reiterating no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons in new member states.[62]

Vladimir Putin was initially less hostile to the idea of NATO itself, even when Russian strategic doctrines continued to consider NATO a threat. He accepted that NATO enlargement as agreed to under Yeltsin was a fait accompli, and at least publicly, he stated he wanted to rebuild Russian relations with NATO. In his meeting with NATO secretary-general George Robertson, Putin stated there was a need to resume Russia-NATO contacts and compare the military doctrines and strategic concepts of Russia and NATO.[63] Putin continued with the mixed messages; in a BBC interview, he said he was willing to theoretically consider the possibility of Russia's becoming a member of NATO in the future, and in a meeting with NATO in February 2001, he mentioned that Russia was willing to coordinate with the United States to form a European-wide missile-defense system, instead of a NATO missile defense in Europe, and he was willing to send Russian experts to Brussels to discuss the

possibility, while explaining the Russian and American cooperation on technology and testing the public interest.[64] For the first time since the Kosovo crisis, Russia announced a full meeting with NATO, even when NATO was reticent about commenting on Russian membership.[65]

The September 11, 2001, attack in the United States changed the strategic dynamics of Europe. Russia was undergoing its own problems with the Chechen insurgency. Immediately after the attack, Putin said, "If NATO takes on a different shade and is becoming a political organization . . . we would reconsider our position with regard to such expansion, if we are to feel involved in such processes."[66] Within two weeks of the attacks, Russia declared that it would assist the United States in operating out of central Asian airbases, typically used and operated by the Russian Air Force and considered to be under the Russian sphere of influence, as well as the unilateral closure of espionage centers in Lourdes, Cuba, and a naval base in Vietnam.[67] In December 2001, the United States unilaterally pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty—an action called a "mistake" on the Russian side, but nothing else was done about it.[68]

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There were significant changes on the side of NATO, as well. The September 11 attacks changed NATO's own reasoning about enlargement from the "democracy promotion" of the Clinton era to an alliance determined to pull together their efforts to tackle international terror. In the 2002 Prague summit, this new line was communicated by President George W. Bush, as he stated, "Expansion of NATO also brings many advantages to the alliance itself. Every new member contributes military capabilities that add to our common security. We see this already in Afghanistan—for forces from Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and others have joined with sixteen NATO allies to help defeat global terror."[69]

This reframing of NATO resulted in further cooperation and made NATO enlargement more palatable to Russia—for the time being. Foreign minister Igor Ivanov confirmed Russian understanding of NATO's new position and said, "Russia no longer considers NATO enlargement to be a menace because the alliance has undergone a radical transformation from a cold war instrument to a defense against global terrorism and other 21st-century threats."[70] When NATO planned to invite seven new countries to join the Alliance at its Prague summit in the fall of 2002, the position was repeated by defense minister Sergei Ivanov. Regarding NATO expansion in the Baltics, Ivanov stated, "Russia is not planning to get overly dramatic about the situation."[71] During the Rome declaration of May 2002, the Russian understanding was that NATO and Russia would act jointly and equally as a side of twenty, instead of the previously-agreed-upon 19+1 formula, and they would focus on both combating international terrorism and their cooperative reaction to crises.[72]

As evident from the sequence of events, Russia was initially skeptical of NATO enlargement in the second phase, when, for the first time, actual member states in the Baltic region that had once formed parts of the Soviet Union were invited to be part of NATO. The NATO hardware and outpost also moved east in a breach of a previously declared red line, and the Kosovo war was viewed in Russia as a direct attempt to claw away at the Russian sphere of influence. The Russian military elites also consistently saw NATO enlargement as a serious threat to Russian security and interests. Previously, in the 1990s, certain sections of the Russian military viewed NATO enlargement as German expansion and a continuation of the German grand strategy in East Europe.[73] During the early 2000s, NATO enlargement started to be considered an American plot to move inexorably eastward as a continuation of American hegemony. While NATO was not part of the Iraq War, it did not have any discernible difference in Russian military thinking—as evident from the statement in 2003, after the Iraq invasion, by Russian general Yuri Baluyevsky: that the world needed to be "multipolar," as otherwise it bred instability.[74] The Russian political leadership's view of NATO showed greater flexibility. That could be attributed to a change in NATO's reframing of its cause of existence, focusing more on counterinsurgency as well as fighting Islamic terrorism. This was similar to Russian interests, as Russia was facing a Chechen insurgency, and thus the Russian perception of NATO's offensive intention underwent a change, which led to a temporary alignment of interests. The Rome declaration of 2002 further changed the relations between Russia and NATO, as procedurally the Russian administration gained the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, and perceived that NATO's primary motivation had shifted to counterterrorism. While the Russian military doctrine remained unchanged, the political speeches highlighted that Russia did not consider NATO a threat, but rather a partner against Islamic terrorism in a changing global-security scenario. Russia did not perceive any offensive intention, and NATO's declared offensive capability did not increase. Russia's perception of threat from NATO, therefore, remained neutral. NATO's declared force posture, with no new weaponry added from the new member states, combined with NATO's focus on counterterrorism, led to Russia perceiving a distinct positive change in the NATO–Russia future.

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RUSSIAN REACTION TO NATO'S INVITATION TO UKRAINE AND GEORGIA

The third and final phase of NATO enlargement is explored in this section. This occurred just before relations with Russia broke down permanently, and Russia, for the first time, went to war with another sovereign state in Europe.

After the second phase of NATO enlargement, in 2004, relations with Russia quickly broke down due to the animosity with the United States over the Iraq invasion; around the same time, color revolutions rocked Russia's neighborhood (discussed in separate chapters, on Ukraine and Georgia). This was also the time when Russian military doctrines changed, and Russian red lines on NATO's further territorial enlargement continued to be presented. Russian political statements and military doctrines reflected this change of perception.

When asked about further NATO membership plans regarding Ukraine and Georgia, Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine should take the plan independently, but he stated categorically that the Russian position regarding territorial expansion remained unchanged—a hint at the Yeltsin-era red line.[75] Russia maintained that the only way Russia would find further NATO expansion acceptable was if NATO transformed itself into a political organization, which, needless to say, NATO had no intention of doing. NATO, meanwhile, was transforming and enhancing its military capability as individual NATO members were preparing for a war in Iraq as part of the "coalition of the willing," something Russia opposed earnestly, and it joined forces with France and Germany to stop. During the war, NATO supported Poland with communications and logistics, and upon the request of Turkey, NATO took precautionary measures to install missile defenses in Turkish territory, even when NATO was not taking part in the war as an organization.[76] Russia continued to maintain that it had concerns with any further NATO expansion, including territorial and infrastructure, and it would change the Russian military doctrines accordingly.[77] When asked specifically about Ukraine again, Russia repeated that Ukraine was free to choose its own future, within the EU, as long as it did not join NATO.[78]

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As NATO continued with plans of another round of expansion, a territorial red line for Russia, NATO also began F-16 patrols over the Baltic Sea and territory around 2004, a significant new development in its offensive capabilities, infuriating Russia. Putin immediately demanded that any new NATO member state accede and ratify the Conventional Forces Treaty to avoid any sort of a "strategic grey area."[79] By that time, there were massive transformations within Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), which added to the Russian understanding that NATO was behind the crisis and was trying to encircle Russia and encroach even farther on its territory. By this period, it was also clear that the Russian intention (and Putin's dream) of a "transformation" of NATO into a political institution instead of a primarily military one, with Russia being an equal member, was not going to be fulfilled anytime soon, mainly because the majority of NATO's members, especially the former Warsaw Pact countries, were disinclined to allow Russia any decision-making powers.[80] NATO's focus on democracy promotion and nation-building in

Iraq corresponded with the Western support of revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine.[81]

Finally, in 2006, at Moscow State University, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said, "We firmly raise questions about the transformation of NATO, the Alliance's plans for enlargement, the reconfiguration of the US military presence in Europe, the deployment of elements of the American missile defense system here, and NATO's refusal to ratify the CFE treaty. The future of our relations largely depends on what direction the transformation in NATO will proceed in after the Riga Summit, and the extent to which the security interests of Russia are going to be considered."[82] The rhetoric from Moscow also was not just directed to NATO, but also to Ukraine and Georgia. Lavrov further warned that any move by Ukraine or Georgia toward NATO would mark a "colossal geopolitical shift" for Russia.[83] The pitch continued to rise with Putin's Munich speech in 2007, in which he said, "I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust."[84] In the same month, the United States planned to talk with Poland and the Czech Republic on the placement of missile defenses, a significant permanent weapons system, which Russia considered a clear threat.[85] At NATO's Bucharest summit in 2008, Putin warned, "We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders . . . as a direct threat to the security of our country."[86] Russian military generals started threatening war with Ukraine if NATO expanded eastward.[87] In 2006, one Russian military journal stated that it would be shortsighted for Russia to ignore the fact that NATO extension might be central to the ambition of the United States striving to achieve unipolarity.[88]

In August 2008, after Russia's war with Georgia, NATO's foreign ministers declared that Russia's military action had been disproportionate and that cooperation in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was suspended until further notice. Around the same time, NATO conducted an exercise in Georgia from May 6 until June 1, 2009, which was perceived in Russia as a clear indication of NATO's design on Russian borders. A 2009 essay from the journal *Military Thought* stated, "As previously, the Americans will continue actively to foist their values on the rest of the world relying on all the force and assets available to them," a charge repeated in 2010 after analysis of ongoing wars of choice by the United States.[89] It stated, "The armed conflicts of the late 20th and early 21st centuries have been a graphic demonstration of the United States' desire for a unipolar world and its determination to solve any problems by force, ignoring the opinion of the world community."[90] During the Arab Spring, the Russian military was certain the instability and events in the Middle East were meant to promote American unipolarity.[91] In most of these

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cases, NATO was considered an arm of broader American grand strategy. Regardless of which it is, in all the cases Russia considered these actions a threat to its security. At any rate, the enlargement plan to add Ukraine and Georgia was the final territorial "red line" and completely unacceptable to Russia, and that was repeatedly made clear from the Russian side. NATO continued to be ambivalent about it and offered Georgia and Ukraine a path to membership, suggesting that their membership in NATO was not a matter of whether, but when. The NATO declaration stated:

> NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore, we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications. We have asked Foreign Ministers to make a first assessment of progress at their December 2008 meeting. Foreign Ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia.[92]

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In August, Russia and Georgia went to war over South Ossetia. Dmitry Medvedev later stated that the war stopped NATO expansion.[93] After the 2008 war, Russia came out with new military doctrines stating that NATO expansion was its greatest threat, and defense minister Sergei Shoigu identified NATO expansion as one of the top-three threats to Russia.[94] On February 5, 2010, President Dmitry Medvedev approved the Russian Federation's new, updated military doctrine, which was being drafted since 2005, right after another phase of NATO expansion in 2004.[95] This text supplemented the Russian National Security Strategy of 2009. The most serious threat was the attempt to "to attribute global functions to NATO in breach of international legal norms" and the NATO infrastructure moving closer to Russian territory. "The deployment (build-up) of troop contingents of foreign states (groups of states) on the territories of states contiguous with the Russian Federation and its allies and also in adjacent waters," the text mentioned, then maintained that the way to solve the threat was a European security initiative and the transformation of NATO into a political union.[96] A more recent revision of the military doctrine was published on December 26, 2014; it also maintained the threats of NATO expansion as well as military infrastructure, large-scale military exercises, and deployment and buildup of military contingents of foreign states or alliances in the neighboring states to Russia.[97] The Prompt Global Strike concept of NATO was mentioned as a military danger, but within the

context of interstate rivalries. With regard to NATO, "an abrupt exacerbation of the military-political situation in interstate relations," "a show of military force" through exercises in Russia's neighborhood, or "obstructing" state and military command and control, by means of a "global strike," were considered a threat.[98] The Russian National Security Strategy, as of December 2015, also cited NATO troop deployments and the induction of former Soviet-allied states as the top threats to Russian security, adding that NATO missile defense plans were destabilizing especially for Russia to protect its natural resource and maritime interests in the Arctic Sea.[99]

In sum, NATO's increased air patrols over the Baltics, their exercises with newer member states, and NATO's invitation to Georgia and Ukraine, after the color revolutions, were considered by Russia as a significant change in the status quo. To them, it was proof of NATO's increasing offensive capability in the region, as well as signs of NATO's intention to encroach upon Russian spheres of influence and move toward Russian borders. Two significant changes happened in this phase. One, Russian politicians and military leaders were finally convinced that NATO had no intention to listen to any Russian concerns about any territorial red lines unless met with force or active deterrence. Two, Russian political leaders and military leaders were convinced that NATO's intentions were to exploit instability around the Russian borders, and NATO's offensive capabilities would continue to increase. As a result, Russian political statements, as well as their military literature and doctrines, began to reflect this altered perception, which continues to this day.

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SUMMARY

In the previous chapters, it was hypothesized that Russia would feel threatened by NATO moving eastward, and that threat perception would be constantly increasing with every single phase of expansion. However, there would be variations in Russian behavior toward NATO, depending on NATO's offensive capability and force posturing, as well as Russia's perception of NATO's offensive intentions.

From the evidence observed, the Russian military elite, as well as its civilian leadership, were always opposed to NATO territorial enlargement; however, the prospect was not taken seriously in the initial days after the Soviet collapse, and it was considered implausible even during the early years of the Yeltsin administration. NATO's first intention of enlargement resulted in Russian alarm, and Russia only agreed to NATO's expansion if two conditions were initially fulfilled, that there would be no new troops or offensive weapons system in the new member states. NATO agreed to the conditions, and the Russia-NATO partnership resulted in further alignment during the

Dayton accords. The NATO Russia Founding Act led to the creation of the Permanent Joint Council, and Moscow accepted NATO's enlargement into central Europe.

During the buildup to NATO operations in Kosovo, NATO discussed the possibility of moving its headquarters from Germany to Poland, thereby moving allied troops into the territories of the newly joined nations. That happened around the same time that NATO intervened in Kosovo, and Russia intervened at the Pristina airport, resulting in a long-drawn-out "Cold Peace" between NATO and Russia, which only thawed when Vladimir Putin became president. Putin perceived that a transformation of NATO from a strictly military alliance inexorably moving eastward to a political alliance might regard Russia as an equal partner, and during the War on Terror, that was materialized briefly, with George W. Bush reframing the NATO alliance as an organization determined to face global terror. That thaw gave way to another round of chill with NATO patrols over the Baltics and NATO's plans of missile-defense shields over central Europe. This flow of offensive capabilities eastward, added to support for democracy promotion in parts of the globe, resulted in new Russian doctrines that reconsidered NATO as an enemy organization determined to encircle Russia.

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Each of the instances of NATO enlargement resulted in a Russian reaction, even when the reaction was varied. Prior to 1993, before serious plans of enlargement were afoot, Russia felt threatened by the aggregate power of NATO, as evident from their strategy documents and military doctrines, which were designed to foster an era of peace and cooperation but also noted Russia's relative weakness. The Russian nuclear posture changed, and Russia discarded the Soviet-era no-first-use policy, which had been a bulwark of Soviet nuclear posture, signaling the Russian elites' acknowledgment of Russia's diminished relative power. When NATO expansion was actually planned, Moscow's shock was palpable, which resulted in Yeltsin declaring that a "Cold Peace" had taken over a "Cold War," as was charted above. Russian Atlanticist policy also changed under Primakov during that time. However, the key factor that stopped Russian balancing behavior wasn't Russia's relative weakness. Russia is still, at present, relatively weaker than NATO. It could be argued that the Russian response was muted due to an agreement of non-deployment of combat troops or nuclear weapons on newer NATO territories. That agreement signified an absence of offensive intention on NATO's part, which reflected in the NATO-Russia founding act, and Russia reactions remained relatively muted. Primakov's threat of redeployment of Russian troops in the West wasn't followed through, as the lack of NATO's troops, hardware, or permanent infrastructure in the newer NATO countries signified an absence of offensive capability buildup, and the NATO-Russia founding act was perceived as a lack of offensive intention

from NATO's side. From NATO's enlargement, in 1999, to NATO's enlargement, in 2004, the ties between Russia and NATO continued to simmer.

The second phase of NATO enlargement took place when Russia, under Vladimir Putin, was starting to move away from the West. As charted above, during President Putin's first few years, there was an evident desire for a rapprochement from the Russian side, especially during and after the 9/11 attacks, due to a combination of various factors. From the Western side, after President Bush's speech in 2002, NATO seemed like a political organization to Russia, with Moscow being an equal partner. The reframing of NATO's purpose negated any perceivable offensive intention on NATO's part, as NATO seemed to be a Russian ally against the broader struggle against Islamic jihadism. However, after the actual expansion in 2004, events moved quickly in Europe. Other than the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, which will be separately studied in the next chapters, NATO patrols began taking place in the Baltics—a territorial red line for Moscow. This marked a remarkable shift in NATO, which, until then, had nominally respected Russia's wishes. The post–9/11 unilateralism of the United States, as well as a shift of balance of power with NATO, resulted from NATO's firepower permanently over the territories that Russia considered under its direct sphere of influence. NATO's offer of eventual membership to Ukraine and Georgia after the color revolutions also was an unmistakable breach of a Russian red line and a sign of the source of a threat moving inexorably closer to the Russian landmass. It could be argued that Russia perceived a change in both the offensive capability and the offensive intention on NATO's part, and that was reflected in Russian military doctrines, as well as Russian political leadership, and led to the Munich security conference speech of 2007. By the time the next phase of expansion took place in Albania and Croatia, NATO-Russia relations had broken down—and there is now a war in Europe between two nation states, over territory, for the first time since the Second World War. Russian military doctrines had also changed by 2010, to reflect the new geopolitical reality.

All the aforementioned evidence demonstrates that Russia behaves per the Balance of Threat theory, when it comes to NATO's aggregate power, territorial proximity, offensive capabilities, and intentions. The behavior of a great power is rarely explained by mono-causality, and therefore the next chapters will explore Russian relations with Ukraine and Georgia and test the theory further.

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Chapter 3

Russian Balancing in Ukraine

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In the previous chapter, this book summarized how the Russian reaction to different phases of NATO enlargement was predicated on Moscow's threat perception. According to the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory, Moscow was supposed to feel threatened by a growing military alliance inexorably moving toward the Russian borders, what Moscow considered an encroachment on its own sphere of influence. The theory also explained why Moscow's threat perception might diminish, if any one of the variables were lacking, or absent; for example, if Russia did not perceive "offensive intention" on NATO's part, the threat perception would be reduced. Observed evidence illustrated that overall, Moscow follows the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory regarding NATO enlargement.

But what about other threats? In the last ten years, Moscow actively participated in two conflicts in the European theatre. The Russo-Georgian war in 2008, and the Russian annexation of Crimea and the ongoing civil war in Ukraine, help test the theory further. For example, if Moscow is a defensive realist power, it will not engage in continuous expansionism. Moscow will only engage in warfare when it seeks to offset some challenges and will return to the status quo once it feels the threat to be neutralized. Likewise, Moscow's strategic motivations will only be limited and structural, and related to material and military considerations, as opposed to ideological or imperial ones. Finally, Moscow's reactions will be based on perceived threats, which Russia would seek to balance. This chapter on Ukraine and the following chapter on Georgia explore these predictions.

Russia considers Ukraine to be vitally important for geopolitical reasons.[1] A large borderland territory, Ukraine serves to protect Russia from potential military intervention by Western powers and is considered by Russia to be in its sphere of influence.[2] Ukraine shares borders with Poland and Romania, is on the edge of the European Union and NATO frontiers, and is therefore a geopolitical buffer to Russia. Even the name *Ukraine*, which roughly translates to "borderland," defines its geopolitical character.

Ukraine is considered a case study for two reasons, as mentioned previously.[3] First, Ukraine is a nation state, compared to NATO, which is an alliance. The Balance of Threat theory dictates that Russia should balance against a threat, as opposed to power itself; then Russian reaction to the threats originating from Ukraine and NATO would be similar. Russia would display balancing behavior if the threat increases and return to the status quo if the threat subsides or is offset by balancing action. The choice of NATO, Ukraine, and Georgia, therefore, makes theory testing for the purposes of this thesis more robust. Second, Ukraine provides a case where a similar type of political situation and threat scenario resulted in two different outcomes. The 2003 Orange Revolution in Ukraine resulted in a change in government and altered the scenario significantly, but unlike the Euromaidan protests of 2014, it did not result in an actual conflict. The question is, why?

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This chapter explores two sequences of events and seeks to explain the difference in Russian behavior. As per the general hypothesis, ideally, *caeteris paribus*, Russia should not feel threatened by Ukraine, given Russia's enormous superiority in aggregate power. Ukraine's pro-EU or pro-NATO tilt, and any revolution in the neighborhood, would, however, alter the security and strategic scenario, and that would be reflected in statements and speeches by Russian politicians, as well as debates in the Russian military and civilian elite circles. But that still ideally would not be enough to go to war. The Russian goal would be to balance—or in this case, presumably offset—any Ukrainian move toward NATO or the EU, or any system or order in alignment with Western security interests, which are perceived as threatening to Russia. Moscow would only therefore actively seek conflict if it feels suddenly threatened by the security scenario on its border, in an eventuality that, perceived through the Russian lens, is existential to Russia's strategic position.

Put simply, Moscow would only use military force if it feels it is losing its privileged position in the balance and needs to offset that situation. If and when Moscow feels satisfied about neutralizing the said threat, it would then revert back to a status-quo position. Moscow would not be imperial and continue on with expansion. In reality, Moscow's military aims would be limited in nature.

What can one observe here in this given scenario? If the theory is correct, and Russian reaction is dependent on aggregate power and offensive capabilities, Russia's perceived threat from Ukraine would be material and would have an economic and military dimension, instead of being just a simple perceived threat to regime stability. First, there would be a distinct material threat to Russian military capabilities, and the loss of Ukraine, from the Russian sphere of influence, or Russian control over Ukrainian politics, region, and capabilities, would be considered an existential threat in Moscow. Russian reaction to the revolutions in both the phases would indicate the

theory is supported; and alternatively, if Russian reaction is muted due to the lack of any causal variables, then the theory would be considered supported. If Moscow is satisfied that Ukraine's westward tilt is thwarted, and the situation falls back to the status quo, then the theory would be supported. Likewise, if Ukraine's tilt toward NATO-EU security and economic structure is incremental, Russian actions to offset that move would be visible, and if need be, violent.

To sum it up, Ukraine's move toward NATO/EU would be considered threatening by Russia and an encroachment by NATO/EU by Moscow. There must be a distinct perceived material/strategic loss, which would be existential to Russia. Russian balancing action would continue for as long as those threats remained, and it would cease when, from Moscow's perspective, the threat diminished or was offset.

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In this chapter, a brief background of Ukrainian and Russian strategic relations is followed by an exploration of two sequences of events—namely, Russian reaction to the color revolution in Ukraine in 2003, and Russian reaction after the Euromaidan revolution. The evidence explored in this chapter suggests that Russia reacted in a similar fashion after both the sudden changes in the balance of power in the region. The loss of Ukraine to NATO, and/or the EU, was considered a huge strategic loss, an existential threat to Russia's status as a great power in the European balance. The Russian balancing actions after 2003 reflected this urgency, but Russia did not resort to military action, as the original situation changed back to the status quo. The second time, however, the situation did not change back to the status quo, and Russia resorted to military action, which resulted in annexing Crimea, a region considered by Moscow of strategic value. Moscow's further interference was limited to regions where its direct strategic interests were located. Either for lack of will, or capability, which is not clear, Russian actions demonstrate that it refused to occupy or annex the whole of Ukraine, and therefore this throws open the question of whether Russia is an expansionist power or a reactive power. Evidence studied mostly relied on military journals and visible Russian actions, rather than political rhetoric, although sometimes they were used for corroboration.

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC MOTIVATIONS IN UKRAINE

Immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were two primary points of contention between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine was left with one-third of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, the third largest in the world, as well as the means of production and designs of the weapons systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, heavy bombers, as well as

approximately 1,700 warheads in Ukrainian territory.[4] Ukraine had physical, but not operational, control of the weapons as they were dependent on Moscow's command and control system.[5] In 1992, Ukraine voluntarily agreed to remove over three thousand tactical nuclear weapons and signed the Budapest Memorandum Agreement on security assurances, with the UK, the United States, and Russia, as well as similar agreements with France and China, to join the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.[6] Russia's guarantee of Ukraine's territorial integrity in return, in the January 14, 1994, Tripartite Agreement was a precondition to Ukraine's unilateral nuclear disarmament.[7] Nevertheless, Russia's military remained dependent on Ukrainian military-industrial strength, located mostly in eastern Ukraine, for manufacturing and maintenance of the supply chains for the Russian military.[8]

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The second and greater disagreement was about the future status of Crimea and Sevastopol.[9] Crimea as a region was administered by the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic since 1954. The city of Sevastopol was the base of the Black Sea Fleet. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet of Russia voted to reclaim the city in 1993, claiming that the port was of strategic importance for the Russian Black Sea Fleet.[10] The Russian Ukrainian summit on the status of Crimea was cancelled from the Russian side several times due to a lack of common ground. Despite Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk's ruling in April 1992 nationalizing the naval components Soviet infrastructure, the Sochi Accord in 1995 highlighted the division of the fleet.[11] The subsequent Ukrainian constitution declared that no permanent military base would be permitted in the territory of Ukraine, but it allowed the use of existing military bases for temporary stationing and lease. The signing of three intergovernmental agreements on the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) on May 28, 1997, by Russian prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and then–Ukrainian prime minister Pavlo Lazarenko resolved both issues.[12] A joint Russian-Ukrainian commission, co-chaired by Chernomyrdin and Lazarenko, agreed to establish a sub-commission on state borders, and in October, the demarcation of the Sea of Azov was finalized.[13]

THE ORANGE REVOLUTION AND RUSSIAN REACTION

Russian relations with Ukraine were more or less stable, up until the color revolutions in the region. Several simultaneous developments changed the security dynamic of the region, some of which were discussed in the previous chapter. To briefly recap, NATO enlargements, the moving of hardware to former Warsaw pact countries, the intervention in Kosovo, and the war in Iraq frayed the relations between Russia and the West. Of that, the color

revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, two countries where Moscow had privileged interests, were the most important developments. The color revolutions in both Ukraine, discussed in this chapter, and Georgia, discussed in the next chapter, therefore, heightened the security dilemma in the region, at a time when Russia was already opposed to what it considered American hegemonic tendencies and "hyperpower" after the Iraq invasion.

In 2004, Ukraine underwent a "peaceful revolution," also known as the Orange Revolution in common parlance, after a fraudulent election.[14] The original election result immediately prior to the Orange Revolution was renounced by the opposition, and the color revolution took place with the backing of domestic opposition, NGOs, and supportive statements from the EU and the United States.[15] For example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, and the International Republican Institute, helped fund the election monitoring by the European Network of Election Monitoring and were critical of the 2004 election. Other NGOs like George Soros's Renaissance Foundation, as well as Western embassies and advisors of former-president Bill Clinton, were in touch with the Yushchenko campaign in advisory and supportive positions. The new president, Viktor Yushchenko, was committed to gaining membership in NATO, and accordingly, foreign minister Borys Tarasyuk stated that Ukraine was determined to start negotiations to join NATO by 2008.[16] The Riga summit in 2006 ensured that Kiev's defense and security policy remained unchanged and irreversible toward an eventual course of joining NATO, a course that was made clear by Russia to be seen as a threat to its national security.[17]

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RUSSIAN BALANCING ACTION TO ORANGE REVOLUTION

Moscow stated originally that Ukraine and Georgia were red lines and their joining of NATO could lead to a colossal shift in the European balance of power.[18] Russian reaction after the Orange Revolution reflected this acknowledgment of the shifting balance of power in the region.[19] In the previous chapter, it was highlighted why the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia made clear that the post-soviet space right on the borders of Russia, which Russia still considered to be an area of privileged interest, was starting to move away from the Russian orbit. Russia was not willing to lose Ukraine and Georgia to NATO, and it considered these two countries as regions of strategic interests between the Russian borders and an ever-expanding NATO and EU.[20] Russia also viewed Ukraine as vital to its national security interest, not only due to Ukraine's location and historical ties with Russia, but also due

to the Ukrainian supplies to the Russian military as well as Moscow's naval supremacy in the Black Sea due to the Russian navy base in Sevastopol.[21] The closer NATO approached to Russia, the more acute the perceived threat became. When added to the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO, the threat became existential from Russia's perspective. The question of Ukraine actually joining NATO was irrelevant from Russia's perspective, as logically Russia could not afford to lose the Ukrainian military supply chains and its privileged position in the Black Sea, and the idea of Ukraine joining NATO was naturally an anathema to Russian policymakers, disconcerting enough to warrant a muscular response.[22]

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and Yushchenko's victory, accordingly, was a shock to the Kremlin.[23] Russian officials accused the United States and NATO of fomenting unrest in Ukraine, and they renewed efforts to pressure the government of Ukraine. Russian reaction to the installation of a pro-Western regime in Ukraine was a combination of both political and economic coercion. Russian political rhetoric grew harsher every day.[24]

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Politically, Russia was critical of what it considered Western meddling in Ukraine, through NGOs and civil society groups.[25] After the color revolution in Ukraine, NGOs and civil society organizations were considered to be Western agents attempting to destabilize the region from Moscow.[26] The National Security Concept of 2000 highlighted that the main security threats to Russia included any weakening of Russian political or military influence, by the strengthening of military unions or blocks and weakening of the integration process of the Commonwealth of Independent States.[27] For Russia, the possibility of Ukraine in the orbit of NATO or the EU would put Russian operations and the control of its Black Sea Fleet in jeopardy, and the Russian imperative was to stop the "conveyor belt" of Kiev moving toward NATO.[28]

Throughout this period, Moscow hinted at red lines and displeasure about the idea of Ukraine joining NATO.[29] Putin, for example, claimed that Ukraine's visa-free movement in the European Union would create problems for Russian-speaking people in Ukrainian territories with ties to Russia.[30] It was a broad hint that Russia was not ready to accept Ukraine as part of the EU, and Russia saw Ukraine's joining the EU as no different from joining NATO, and Russia judged it from a territorial perspective.

The displeasure about Ukraine's prospective turn toward the EU and NATO was experienced across the top tier of Moscow's political elite. Russia's ambassador to Ukraine, Viktor Chernomyrdin, refused to accept that Ukraine had any separate identity apart from Russia. In various interviews around this time, Chernomyrdin provocatively said that "Ukraine and Russia have never lived as two sovereign states. Ukraine has never been a sovereign government. Now we have to learn how to perceive her as such," and "Russia was always an independent state. Ukraine never was. There never was such

a country."[31] In January 2006, Russian deputy prime minister and minister of defense Sergei Ivanov wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that Russia's top concern was the "stability of the internal situation in some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the regions around them."[32]

US-associated supporters of the Orange Revolution included the Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute of the Democratic Party (NDI), and the International Republican Institute of the Republican Party (IRI), as well as NGOs like Freedom House and the Open Society Institute, which provided funding to activists during the color revolutions, as well as assisted with training and PR.[33] Russian intelligence and the Russian government increasingly started to view—and refer to—foreign NGOs as agents of the United States and NATO, and they viewed all foreign organization and efforts in security terms.[34] Moscow claimed that domestic actors in Ukraine also did not act alone, as they received funding and training from NGOs and other organizations, and were trained in civil disobedience, as purported agents of the West.[35] The EU monitors brought in during elections were regarded with utmost skepticism in Moscow.[36] All these external supports were used by Russia to frame the Orange Revolution as an illegitimate, Western-backed coup, and to drive Russia out from its sphere of influence.[37]

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Economically, Russian-Ukrainian relations after the Orange Revolution were marred by energy disputes, and Russia used energy prices as a weapon to coerce the new Ukrainian government. Added to the political rhetoric, Russian economic pressure on Ukraine started to increase. Ukraine had an unbalanced trade relationship with Russia, as it relied on Russian energy and Russia being a key consumer of Ukrainian exports, whereas Russia could bypass Ukraine and still sell energy to Europe. After the Orange Revolution, there were major shifts in the Russian energy policy toward Ukraine.[38] For example, Gazprom, and other energy companies controlled by Moscow, threatened to rescind their deals with Ukraine and cut off Ukraine's energy supply unless Ukraine paid higher prices. These pricing disputes continued until 2006, when Gazprom did cut off the energy supply to Ukraine, convincing Ukraine to bow to Russian pressure. The prices were discriminatory and arbitrary, and the existing agreements, which had established gas prices of fifty dollars per one thousand cubic meters were increased to $230 per one thousand cubic meters. Russia blocked the transit of Turkmen gas shipments to Ukraine, and Russian energy companies used their profits to purchase equity stakes in Ukraine, further increasing their control of Ukrainian energy markets. The prices were not reduced until the Yanukovych government agreed to do so after a compromise with Russia in exchange for a twenty-five-year extension on the lease to the naval base in Sevastopol. Russian government officials suggested that the energy prices

were political rather than economic.[39] The 2003 Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 stated that the country's fuel and energy complex is "an instrument for the conduct of internal and external policy. The role of a country in world energy markets largely determines its geopolitical influence."[40] During the peak of the gas crisis, Russia, for the first time, threatened to annex Crimea. When the Yushchenko government warned that Ukraine would be forced to revise the treaty concerning the rent of the Sevastopol, the Russian defense minister stated that it might lead to the revocation of the 1997 Ukrainian-Russian friendship treaty, which recognized the 1954 boundaries, including Crimea, as part of modern Ukraine.[41] Simultaneously, Russia started funding and advising Yanukovych's election campaign.[42]

In December 2005, the Russia-Ukraine energy dispute ended with the termination of gas deliveries by Gazprom.[43] The two sides carried on negotiations so that Ukraine continued to receive a subsidized price in exchange for a low transit fee. In 2006, Putin reminded Ukraine that "over the last 15 years Russia subsidized the Ukrainian economy by a sum that amounted to $3 to 5 billion each year," and "each year we raised the issue of whether we should change to the European regime for determining prices."[44] In December 2008, Russia turned off the energy deliveries to Ukraine, and the entire country of Ukraine, as well as Eastern Europe, suffered without gas. Ukraine was undergoing domestic divisions, and Putin in his capacity as the prime minister of Russia negotiated directly with Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who was running for the presidency and wanted a détente with Russia.[45] In January 2009, a new ten-year contract and energy deals were signed. The rhetoric from Russia, however, continued to be harsh, and in 2009, Russia denounced Ukraine for pursuing anti-Russian policies by supporting Georgia during the 2008 war as well as interfering in the movements of the Black Sea Fleet in and out of Sevastopol.[46] Ukraine's constant attempt to achieve membership in NATO was also repeatedly taken up by Russia, and by August 2008, it looked like the plans for further NATO expansion were stalled, as Russia continued to criticize OSCE/NATO for creating a security system in Europe that attempted to create new lines of division between nations with a common history. The Russian use of oil and gas as a weapon and the terms of the settlement of the gas crisis damaged the Yushchenko government, whose party took third place in the 2006 elections. By late 2006, Russia's favorite candidate, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yanukovych, was negotiating a settlement more in line with Moscow's demands.[47]

To sum up, the Russian reaction to the victory of Yushchenko in Ukraine was severe. Moscow considered the shift of Ukraine toward the West to be a geostrategic calamity, and it felt threatened by the EU and NATO's move eastward. It seemed to cross a long-held red line. Moscow also termed the Orange Revolution a Western-backed coup and considered NGOs and other

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civil society movements to be Western agents, funded and trained by NATO, the United States, and the EU, meant to destabilize Russian spheres of influence and eventually push Russia out.[48] Ukraine's relation with Russia destabilized so rapidly following the Orange Revolution that almost half the Ukrainian population believed there could actually be a war with Russia. After the Orange Revolution, Moscow adopted an antagonistic approach toward Yushchenko's presidency. In 2008, Kiev protested the Russian distribution of passports to Ukrainian citizens by the Russian consulate in Simferopol, around the same time that Russia was in a war with Georgia to "protect Russian citizens."[49]

Russia's main animosity was against the Ukrainian government's political support of Georgia, and rhetoric against the Black Sea Fleet, which Russia considered vital to force projection. Ukraine's position—that there was no alternative but to join NATO—and NATO's Bucharest summit in 2008, which welcomed Ukrainian and Georgian aspiration to NATO membership, was another "red line." Russian nationalist think tanks, which reflected the position of the Russian political and military elite, openly started to sound war drums over Crimea.[50] It might be likely that the plan for an annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol had already been developed by the Russian general staff, in the event Kiev joined NATO, and Moscow was on the verge of losing the Black Sea Fleet port. The rhetoric was certainly moving in that direction.

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However, the aggression was unnecessary as Yanukovych won.[51] The economic pressure on Ukraine coupled with the rift among the leaders of the Orange Revolution, which started almost immediately after the election in December 2004 and continued. Yulia Tymoshenko's tenure as prime minister lasted until September 2005, and in March 2006, the Orange Revolution coalition collapsed as the pro-Moscow Party of Regions, led by Viktor Yanukovych, won. In contrast to the 2004 election, in which Russia had openly supported Yanukovych, in 2010 Russian advisors worked behind the scenes to promote his candidacy. Moscow was relieved with the outcome, as Yanukovych made an improvement of ties with Russia his main platform, and he was strongly opposed to Ukraine's membership of NATO, in support of a neutral, non-bloc status, and in April 2010, in exchange for a reduced price on Russian gas, he agreed to extend the lease for the Sevastopol naval base for the next twenty-five years. Yanukovych also reversed Ukraine's previous position on opposing Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[52]

EUROMAIDAN AND THE RUSSIAN REACTION

Russia returned to status-quo behavior and overt hostility decreased as the threat of Ukraine rapidly moving toward the NATO-EU security architecture

stalled. For example, despite Ukraine's declared neutrality, Yanukovych's reversal of his previous Orange Revolution position made Russia assume that Ukraine was on course to join the Russia-led Eurasian order and CSTO. In 2010, reflecting that, President Medvedev noted that "Life does change, and if Ukraine decides to join the CSTO in the future, we would be happy to open the door for you, and welcome you into our ranks."[53] Earlier, in May 2009, the launch of the Eastern Partnership by the EU was considered a geopolitical challenge to the further integration of the CIS states by Russia.[54] The Russian characterization of the EU's geopolitical agenda was no different from that of NATO, or the West in general.[55] But relations improved in 2010 following a change of government, as the two sides agreed to extend the lease on Russia's Black Sea Fleet for the next twenty-five years in exchange for a reduced gas price, and in 2011, Russia proposed the formation of a new Eurasian union, attempting to solidify a Russian sphere of influence in the face of a renewed NATO and EU push eastward. Russia formed the Customs Union in 2010, including Belarus and Kazakhstan, and it formally invited Ukraine to join in 2011, with another offer of reduced gas prices. The Union became operative in 2012, and Putin pledged Ukraine another fifteen billion dollars in aid.[56] Since his election in 2010, Yanukovych had blocked Ukrainian bid toward further NATO accession, and in 2013, signaled Ukrainian moves toward the Russian-led Customs Union, and the Russian offers of Customs Union membership in place of EU's Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement seemed final. At the EU summit in Vilnius, the Ukrainian president announced his decision to postpone the Association agreement with the EU. By 2014, relations between the Russian and Ukrainian governments seemed positive, even when Russian rhetoric continued to be accusatory toward NATO and the EU.[57]

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Around this stage, the Ukrainian opposition, critical of the direction their country was taking, and diplomatically supported by the EU and the United States, started to protest in and around Kiev. Ukraine slid into lawlessness as Western support for the protesters increased.[58] Yanukovych refused to accept the opposition's demand, the EU-brokered agreement collapsed in February 2014, and Yanukovych fled to Eastern Ukraine and then to Russia. The Ukrainian uprising happened in and around the time of the Sochi Olympics, and the strategic situation rapidly reversed in the region as Ukrainian president Yanukovych fled Kiev.

RUSSIAN BALANCING ACTION TO EUROMAIDAN

From the Russian side, this was considered an "unconstitutional coup" in Kiev, which changed the strategic situation of the region and established

new rules on the ground.[59] Russian worry of Ukraine joining the EU had an economic dimension, as Ukraine—with forty-five million people—was an important market of Russian exports.[60] Any association agreement would hamper Russian exports, as Russian products did not match the safety standards required by the European Union. But the primary concern was geopolitical.[61] The association agreement also included clauses that would integrate Ukraine to the EU's common security and defense policies, which reinforced Moscow's idea that the EU was not just a political union, but an extension of NATO ambitions in the East. The European Union was considered a great power in the making, influencing the geopolitics of the Russian sphere of influence and pushing Russia out.

By 2009, Russia was warning against the EU influencing and destabilizing Ukraine. Sergei Lavrov stated that "We [the Russians] are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence?"[62] Konstantin Kosachev, the chairman of the Russian parliament's foreign-policy committee, described the EU as an emerging "hyper-power, which, like a gigantic whirlpool, is slowly but surely sucking in our neighbors."[63] By August 2013, senior Russian presidential advisors were warning that Ukraine should not cede sovereignty to the EU and should join the Russia-led Customs Union, and that if Ukraine joined the EU, Russia would consider Ukraine to be a strategic threat.[64] Moscow simultaneously launched a trade war against Ukraine in 2013, whereby Russia restricted the import of Ukrainian goods while offering a generous package of economic and financial assistance on the condition that Yanukovych complied with Russian demands and turned down the association agreement. Russia also pledged fifteen billion US dollars in low-interest loans and a discount on natural gas. Yanukovych rejected the agreement with the EU a few days before the "Eastern Partnership" summit in Vilnius at the end of November 2013.[65] After three months of violent protests, rioting, and mass demonstrations, President Yanukovych was toppled in February and fled to Russia. The new leadership in Kiev made it clear that Ukraine's future lay in the West and Ukraine was determined to sign the EU association agreement.[66] With the rise of Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Moscow was certain that Crimea was going out of hand and Russia would lose the base for the Black Sea Fleet. A pro-Western government at the doorstep of Russia, determined to join the EU and NATO, along with the Russian loss of the Baltic naval base, was unacceptable to the Russian military and political elite. Within days, Crimea was annexed by Russian soldiers without insignia. They were Russian soldiers as identified by the hardware they used, although at that time, it was denied by Moscow.

In the six weeks following the Euromaidan revolution, Crimea was annexed, while Russia continuously denied that its soldiers were involved.[67] After the annexation of Crimea, Russia demanded that Kiev initiate new constitutional

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changes that guaranteed the protection of Russian speakers and decentralized the leadership of the region. Russia also amassed over thirty thousand troops on Ukraine's border and retracted the energy discount and financial aid for Kiev. In April 2014, however, Putin stated that Russian servicemen had backed the Crimean self-defense forces, and that Russia created certain conditions "with the help of special armed groups for the expression of the will of the people in Crimea and Sevastopol."[68] Regarding the conflict that broke out in parts of Eastern Ukraine, Putin continued to initially deny that there were any Russian forces or instructors in Southeastern Ukraine. Later, however, with the scale of Russian intervention, weapons, hardware, and mercenaries involved, it was clear that Russia had intervened in the conflict.[69] Putin further argued that the Russian troops in Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet faced a direct threat to their security and appealed to the Russian Federation Council to allow the use of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine—while referring to the threat of Russian military forces. In March, Putin referred to the declarations of Kiev about Ukraine joining NATO; he indicated that would mean NATO's navy would be right in the city of Russia's military glory and threaten the whole of Southern Russia. He said Russia would be practically ousted from the Black Sea, ending up with a diminished coastline of only 450 kilometers. In June, the Russian president stated that the "anti-constitutional coup" in Ukraine would mean EU and NATO infrastructure would move directly toward the Russian border—and that must be stopped at any cost.[70] Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu also stated that the danger of seizure of the Russian military infrastructure by extremist organizations in Crimea required tightened security at Russian military facilities in Crimea.[71] The political rhetoric emanating from Moscow was solely directed at the EU and the United States. For example, Putin, on the eve of the Crimean referendum, said, "And with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear [sic] and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally."[72] Similarly, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said, "Brussels told Ukraine to choose between the West and Russia. Everybody knows the root causes of the crisis: we were not being listened to, Kiev was forced into signing arrangements with the European Union, which had been drafted behind the scenes and, as it eventually turned out, were undermining Ukraine's obligations on the CIS free trade area. When Viktor Yanukovich took a pause for a closer look at the situation, the Euromaidan protests were staged. Then there followed the burning tires, the first casualties and an escalation of the conflict."[73] The swiftness of the takeover suggested that contingency plans had been in place for a while.

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ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN BALANCING

So, why did Russia get involved in a conflict after 2014 and not after 2003? According to the Balance of Threat theory and the hypotheses listed above, Russian aggression would occur when Moscow was under the impression that its independent standing as a great power was threatened due to either loss of control over the buffer region, which it considered under its own sphere of influence, or when Moscow appeared to understand that its military balance was under threat—or both simultaneously. Alternatively, if Moscow regained control over the region without resorting to conflict, then the status quo would be maintained. The most plausible explanation for the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2011 is, therefore, rooted in security relations and relative power, which establishes that Russia intervened in Ukraine to set a geopolitical fault line between the West and Russia. To achieve the aim of stopping Ukraine falling into the Western orbit, Russia need not always resort to offensive action. The key issue since 1991 has been that Ukraine is considered vital for Russian interests, and without a pro-Russian, or at least neutral, Ukraine, Russian status as a great power is questionable. Russia not only would lose its biggest territorial buffer, but also major resources vital for national security, as well as its privileged position in the post-soviet economic space. While Russia could not force Ukraine to join a pro-Russian security order, it could make Ukraine toxic for NATO and the EU and deny its westward move. Ukraine's integration into Western structures would shift the strategic balance in Europe, ending any Russian hope of a sphere of influence and a buffer zone, as well as a neo-Soviet hegemony composed of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

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The history between Russia and Ukraine suggests a pattern. Whenever there is a distinct possibility that Ukraine would join the Western security arrangement, whether through the EU or through NATO, Russia ratcheted up the pressure. During both the 2003 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Euromaidan revolution, this pattern was followed. The difference was the scale of Russian aggression. Foreign-policy analysis is rarely monocausal, and while it is difficult to understand and theorize Russian reaction without a complete picture, a study of all the cases analyzing Russian reaction vis-à-vis Ukraine suggests two alternative possibilities. Chaos in Ukraine would be considered a ploy by the rival alliance or power center to push Moscow from its sphere of influence. As Walt suggested, and as was discussed in detail in chapter 3, a revolution in the neighborhood is viewed by a great power as a chaos where rival powers try to take advantage, to push the dominant power out of its sphere of influence. If Russia acted per the Balance of Threat theory, then, as mentioned above, Russian considerations would be primarily

material, economic, and military. The perceived threats in Moscow would be related to a Russian independent existence as a great power, and the loss of Ukraine would be existential to Russia's standing in the European security scenario. The alternative scenario was that Russia feared that if Ukraine was destabilized, the effect would spread to Russian neighbors, and eventually to Moscow. The cause of threat, therefore, would be a threat to the regime stability, and not a threat to Russian standing as a great power due to a decrease in aggregate power and military capabilities.

It is evident, in the case of Ukraine, that Russia considered Ukraine to be slipping away from Moscow's orbit. In the first instance, economic pressure and the internal collapse of the revolutionary regime of Yushchenko meant that Russia did not have to resort to using overt or covert force. In the second instance, the threat was much more serious—and rapid—leaving Russia no option other than using force to create a fait accompli in the region, as well as stall Ukraine's permanent shift to the Western orbit.

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To use Zbigniew Brezinski's terminology, without Ukraine, Russia ceased to be a Eurasian empire.[74] While that might be a bit too rhetorically far-fetched, it is true that if Russia controlled Ukraine, even as a satellite, it would continue to have access to an enormous territorial buffer, a market for Russian products, as well as strategic resources and access to the Black Sea.[75] Russian actions in Ukraine, after both the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan, have been, therefore, based on strategic denial. Great powers, whether defensive realist or offensive realist, according to realism, do not give up their privileged positions in the balance on their own.

The Russian military has been heavily resources-dependent on Ukraine. Prior to the annexation of Crimea, Ukrainian firms produced over three thousand components and armament systems for the Russian military, including the components for manufacture as well as maintenance of the primary Russian nuclear deterrence, the RM-36 (NATO designation SS-18 Satan) intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), designed by the Yuzhnoye Design Bureau and manufactured by the Yuzhmash industrial complex in Dnipropetrovsk.[76] According to the Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin, Russia was incapable of acquiring such products anywhere else.[77] Ukraine also produced the guidance systems for the SS-25 mobile missile launchers and SS-19 silo-based strategic missiles in the eastern parts of Ukraine, in Kharkiv.[78]

Likewise, the Russian navy was mostly built and maintained in Ukraine.[79] The Mykolaiv oblast had been the key shipbuilding center since the Soviet times, and it continues to produce parts for the Russian navy's capital ships, including its flagship, the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*.[80] Eastern Ukraine and the Black Sea coast, therefore, remained crucial for Russian naval deterrence. The Russian Air Force uses air-to-air

missiles produced in Eastern Ukraine, and the maintenance of the hydraulic system for Russian fighters like the Su-34 is also performed in Eastern Ukraine. Russian transport used jet engines made by the Antonov factory in Ukraine. Almost all Russian modern tank components are built in the Kharkiv Locomotive Factory. Ukraine's military-industrial complex is almost entirely located in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, due to logistical and trade reasons, and is now currently the scene of heavy rebel activity. Critical Ukrainian components and their servicing comprise up to 80 percent of Russia's strategic missiles forces, and without Eastern Ukraine, Russian nuclear deterrence, and its naval forces, would collapse.[81] It is also no coincidence that the heavy fighting around the city of Kramatorsk is over the control of the NKMZ industrial complex, which produces hardware like mining equipment, steel mills, etc., for the Russian military. The Russian control of Crimea, for example, added thirteen Ukrainian defense companies, and eighteen defense companies located between Donetsk and Luhansk are also under de-facto Russian control. These are of invaluable importance to the Russian plan of massive military rearmament, and Russian independence deterrence depends on the maintenance of these supply and logistics chains.[82]

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The gains to the Russian military after the annexation of Crimea were historic and substantial in terms of strategic capabilities and potential. Russian annexation of Crimea and the acquisition of assets created a new fait accompli and resolved the issue of uncertainty about Russian basing rights. The April 2010 ratification of the quarter-century lease of Sevastopol was conditional to whoever was in power in Kiev, and after Euromaidan, Russia could not be sure of the intentions of a new Ukrainian government and a revision of the lease terms or rights. Moscow was not happy about the constraints about the type of crafts and treaty terms that prevented any expansion of the numbers of the Black Sea Fleet, and it was in continuous legal conflict with the wording of the Ukrainian constitution, which prohibited foreign bases. All those constraints were essentially swept away.[83]

Russian control, and the retaining and scuttling of the Ukrainian fleet, meant that Russia eclipsed Turkey as the largest naval power of the region. Russia captured and interned most of Ukraine's twenty-five warships as well as upgraded its Black Sea Fleet.[84] Russia also took possession of the Ukrainian naval bases Novoozerne and Myrnyi (Donuzlav Lake), Saky, Balaklava, and a marine infantry base at Feodosiya, alongside Sevastopol. The Russian possession of Sevastopol also stopped all payments and recurring expenditures from Russia to Ukraine—an enormous amount of funds freed up to be used in military rearmament programs.[85] A few days before Yanukovych fled to Russia, former Russian general staff Yuri Baluyevsky stated that Russia should urgently reinforce and expand the Black Sea Fleet, and take advantage of the general situation. While there is no direct evidence

of Russian military planning channeling this specific idea, in March 2014, the Russian deputy defense minister Yuri Borisov echoed the same logic, asserting the military infrastructure of Crimea was being developed to demonstrate to the whole world the Russian aspirations and capabilities. Shortly after the Crimean annexation, by September, Russian forces were being deployed in self-sufficient groups under the Russian southern military district providing military reinforcement and restoration of the Black Sea Fleet, upgrading naval weapons in Feodosiya, reactivating a dormant submarine base in Sevastopol, and establishing long-range bombers in Soviet-era bases in Gvardeyskiy, Kacha, Saky, and Belbak. The Russian Air Force's strategic aviation division, meant solely to deter NATO forces, was planning new patrol routes as Russian territorial waters expanded. The Russian troop reinforcement plans included new coastal defense and artillery units, as well as naval exercises practicing the attack of NATO warship detachments in nearby seas. The Russian annexation of Crimea also resulted in the Kerch Strait being under the full control of Moscow, as well as Russian dominion over the Ukrainian continental shelf and exclusive economic zone and hydrocarbon resources. The strategic significance of Crimea to the Russian military elite was enormous, and the annexation of Crimea was influenced by broader strategic considerations to enhance Russian military powers abroad. Russian forces in Crimea were to be easily available to project force in the east and south of Ukraine, in greater Odessa or a land bridge to Transnistria. The Russian airborne troop chief echoed the same planning regarding Crimea's increase of combat potential and force projection capabilities outside the theatre far beyond Russia, similar to what Defense Minister Shoigu had said about Russian military presence in key parts of the globe.

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The Russian hostility toward the Orange Revolution and the confirmation of Viktor Yushchenko as Ukrainian president, as well as large-scale street protests backed up by NGOs and civil societies, was wholly unexpected in Moscow. It led to the belief that the Western powers and rivals used competition around election processes and used measures to interfere in foreign states to align those states to Western policy. In a way, Russia viewed the Orange Revolution and subsequently other color revolutions as a form of a hybrid war, which arguably shaped the Russian strategic thinking.

This idea, that a foreign-funded "revolution" is a means of statecraft, was embedded in the Russian geopolitical worldview. For example, Vladimir Putin continued to claim that the Orange Revolution was meant to "push the necessary candidate through at presidential elections"—making a mockery of the constitution.[86] He repeated the same criticism in February 2014, stating that the only difference between the Orange Revolution of 2003–2004 and the Euromaidan revolution in 2014 was that this time, "They have thrown in an organized and well-equipped army of militants." In between, this idea,

that any similar people's overthrow of governments, whether in Europe or in the Middle East, are essentially a Western policy in which "standards are imposed on other nations," leads to chaos, violence, and upheaval. Russia itself faced protests in urban centers between December 2011 and May 2012, with thousands protesting against vote rigging, which resulted in Russian military elites warning against threats to CSTO states and Russian spheres of influence posed by color revolutions, whereby "socio-economic and political problems of individual states" are used by outside forces under "democratization slogans." Russian deputy defense minister Anatoly Antonov warned that Russia was closely watching attempts to target Russia's nearest neighbors, because in essence they were directed against Russian interests. Defense minister Sergei Shoigu was more direct and said that these upheavals were increasingly "devised in accordance with rules of warfare."

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ALTERNATIVE THEORIES ABOUT RUSSIAN BALANCING

The alternative scenario is the conventional wisdom in foreign-policy circles.[87] To sum up, scholars insist that Russia is governed by a handful of cronies, and the Russian regime is inherently fearful of major protests, considering any such protests in the neighborhood as a threat. Stoner suggests that this aggressive posture at any change in the neighborhood is inherently driven by a desire to remain stable internally because the Russian regime needs the occasional boost of nationalistic prestige. McFaul suggests that the Russian regime did not suddenly grow aggressive as a response to American and NATO expansion and the Ukrainian move toward the EU, but rather, it did so when Putin and his cronies came under attack for the first time after the 2011 elections, with smart Russian youth protesting against stagnation on the streets of Moscow.

This alternative understanding of Russian reactions being contingent to regime stability at home lacks explanatory power because of two reasons. One, Putin's popularity at home was never in serious doubt.[88] There is no evidence that a hundred thousand (maximum) protesters in Moscow, without a single unified opposition, would have shaken Vladimir Putin, who consistently enjoyed overwhelming support and approval ratings, measured by even the most independent of pollsters in Russia. Second, the idea that the Russian regime is threatened by an unstable neighborhood because it fears for its own security is not supported because of Russian varied behavior. Russian reactions to revolutions are not similar.[89]

For example, recently in Armenia, there was no Russian aggressive action, as a reaction to a regime change after a color revolution. The Russian

aggression in Ukraine, after the Euromaidan revolution, also similarly remained subdued and relegated in the east and did not spread to the western parts of Ukraine. One line of reasoning might be that the Russian elite were fearful that their grip in power might slide, and their regime stability would be hampered if there were successful revolutions in the neighborhood. That is a plausible counterargument that Russian reactions, both during the Orange Revolution and during Euromaidan, were due to domestic considerations, but that argument has scant evidence to support it. Russia has internal problems and dissent, but none of them serious enough to threaten Putin's hold. For example, Putin's approval ratings were extremely high before the Ukrainian intervention, and they continue to remain high, as the latest elections show. Putin hardly needs to improve his domestic standing. By 2013, the Kremlin was confident of a conservative majority, which remained steady, after it studied the social reaction during the Anti-Magnitsky Act, the trial of the band Pussy Riot, and Russian laws against NGOs. Putin and the Russian regime realized that their ratings remained steady, a confidence that was evident as Putin pardoned twenty thousand prisoners, the members of Pussy Riot, as well as long-term critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Many of those who were charged during the Russian protests in 2012 were also released, and Russian hosting of the Olympics also boosted Putin's standing. There is no robust evidence that the Russian government's aggressive actions are, therefore, directed at a domestic audience, either as a diversionary war, or due to concerns about regime stability.

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There is also another line of reasoning that claims that Russian actions in Ukraine are determined by ideology. The theory behind this is that Russia is waging an ideological war, reclaiming the territory of Novorossiya based on ideas of Eurasianism, or conservatism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity.[90] A simple test of this hypothesis is to look at the rise and fall of the rhetoric of the now-discredited Novorossiya project. It was arguably used to justify Moscow's actions in Ukraine and mobilize the Russians to rally around the flag. The project was discarded arguably due to its strategic objectives being achieved.[91] Had it been an ideological war, it would have carried on and spread to other parts of Ukraine. It did not, and the Novorossiya rhetoric was quietly dropped in Moscow soon after.

The primary driver for Russian actions, therefore, seems to be structural, as influenced by geopolitical and strategic considerations. The aim, as evidenced, was to maintain Russian control over naval bases and the military industrial centers in Ukraine. While there is no archival evidence that will be available anytime soon, the public discussions, statements in the Russian military and political circles, and the pace of the annexation of Crimea suggest that the contingency plan had already been in place for a while. After the annexation of Crimea, and Moscow's rapid confirmation to upgrade the existing bases

on the peninsula, as well as the drafted plans to add new ships to the existing Fleet, Russia has extended control over the entirety of the Black Sea, specifically in the strategically important chokepoints like the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov. Added to that, it was a message to Kiev, as well as Brussels and Washington, DC, that there would be costs, including territorial loss and violence, if Russian interests were ignored.

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Chapter 4

Russian Balancing in Georgia

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Georgia, like Ukraine, is considered to be of vital strategic importance to Moscow. Georgia is a vital supply line of Russian energy to the European heartland, and an important trade route for Russian exports. Georgia is also strategically significant, due to its proximity to the restive Caucasus region, and a source of instability in Chechnya, a cause of permanent concern in Russian strategic circles.[1] Russia also historically considered itself to be the net security provider of the region, and Georgia, alongside Ukraine, is considered in the Russian post-soviet traditional sphere of influence, and a red line that Moscow does not want NATO to cross.[2]

Georgia is selected as a case study for two reasons. First, like Ukraine, Georgia is a nation state with which Russia engaged in a recent conflict. And it is not an alliance like NATO, and therefore, this strengthens the evidence of Russian behavior per the Balance of Threat theory. Simply put, if Russia genuinely balances against threat, the Russian reaction would be similar with regard to Georgia as it is with Ukraine and NATO; Russia would display balancing behavior if the threat increases, regardless of Georgia's actual size or capability. Alternatively, Russia would return to the status quo once it perceives any threat is reduced or neutralized. The addition of Georgia as a case study makes the theory testing more robust and gives a strong Eurocentric background to the overall study, which can be further tested or replicated in future research should a similar situation arise in Europe. Given that Europe (including the EU/NATO) is arguably facing a renewed Russian factor in its strategic calculations, this would provide some policy relevance, as well.

Second, Georgia is important for theoretical testing because the 2008 Russo-Georgian war was the first instance in which Russian troops went to combat in a full-scale war in the European theatre, crossing the threshold of suboptimal and covert conflict into open, declared, full-spectrum warfare. It was the first time Moscow threatened, at least rhetorically, to occupy the capital city of another sovereign state, and for the first time, crossed over from the controversial breakaway provinces to the undisputed Georgian mainland.

It was also the only conflict in Europe where Russia was a party, and it had a fixed beginning and end date and a declared ceasefire. It broke the unwritten post–Cold War norm of European politics, in which Russia was expected to be intensely hostile at times, but never powerful enough to actually react militarily, at least on the European continent. While the conflict by covert Russian troops in Ukraine continues to be more militarily intense, Georgia preceded it, and along with the Munich Security Conference speech by Vladimir Putin in 2007, it marked the end of the ambiguity about Russia as a problematic but relatively balanced power, changing into an adversarial power as well as the strategic scenario of Europe.

The case study of Georgia therefore serves an additional purpose. It not only corroborates the hypothesis of Russian balancing against increased threat, as established in the previous chapter, but it also bolsters the claim that Russia is a status-quo power. That is the purpose of this chapter, not just to support the previous chapter on Ukraine about Russian overall balancing action, but also to illuminate a theoretical question. This chapter works as a section complementing the previous two chapters; it explores Russian expansionism, or the lack thereof; and it attempts to debate whether Russia acts according to the dictates of offensive realism and power maximizing. The Georgian war of 2008—compared to more balancing actions against NATO, and a covert war with Ukraine, with a fixed start, an end date, and a return to the relative strategic status quo—provides a rebuttal to the argument that Russia is simply an expansionist power.

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Structurally similar to the previous chapter, this chapter also explores two sequences of events. But given the historical nature, the design of this chapter's narrative is slightly different from the previous one. First, as per the general hypothesis, Russia should not perceive any threat from Georgia, and it would be satisfied with the status quo of the post–Cold War role of the net security provider of the region. That would change and Russia would react militarily, if according to the Balance of Threat theory, Russia perceives a sudden change of strategic reality, including Georgia shifting toward a rival alliance that encroaches upon the traditional Russian sphere, or increasing Georgian belligerence, almost all of which would result in Russian strategic loss. Any such maneuver from Tbilisi would be interpreted by Moscow as a buildup of offensive capability, or an offensive intention on Georgia's part, which would alter the security and strategic scenario. Direct Russian actions to offset that would then be visible, and a return to the status quo would be only visible if Russia was confident that Georgia posed no further threat to Russian strategic interests. Russia would therefore actively engage in conflict to offset Georgian overtures toward NATO and EU, or any sudden systemic change in the order or alignments of the region.

Second, if Russia was a power maximiser, it would act in a way consistent with expansionism. If Russia was not a power maximiser, it would be content as long as its security and strategic interests in the region, as well as the balance of power, remained broadly in Moscow's favor. In the former case, Russian military operations would be contingent to other occupation forces, and they would follow—or attempt to follow through—a process of forcible regime change. In the latter case, Russian operations would cease after a time, show a narrower strategic approach, and be limited in nature. If Russia was a security maximizer and a defensive realist power, the aims of Russia's actions would be limited. If not, Russia would be acting as a power maximiser and offensive realist power.

In this chapter, a brief history of Russo-Georgian relations is relayed, followed by a brief discussion about Russian strategic interests in Georgia. That leads to the next part of the chapter, in which the causes of the buildup to the war are considered. Evidence of Russian perceptions of Georgian intention and offensive capability buildup, as well as the change in the geostrategic scenario that led to the war of 2008, are discussed, with evidence to show what altered the Russian reaction, what brought strategic restraint, and what led the two countries to war. The final part of the chapter illustrates why Russia did not act as an expansionist power and why Russian reactions were contingent to a security-maximizing role.

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HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT

The conflict between Moscow and Tbilisi traces its roots back to April 1989, when Soviet tanks put down demonstrations there, leading to Georgia being the first Soviet republic to secede.[3] In the following sporadic conflict between the Georgian central government and the South Ossetian autonomous oblast, the Georgians continuously claimed that South Ossetia was receiving financial, material, and military support from North Ossetia, which was part of the Russian Federation. In June 1992, for example, the Russian supreme Soviet warned of intervention, and the annexation of South Ossetia, to stop Georgian attacks on Ossetian civilians. Russia mediated the Sochi Agreement in 1992, establishing a frozen conflict with the Joint Control Commission and combined patrols of Russian, Ossetian, and Georgian forces. Georgia allowed Russia to keep four military bases in the region, as well as the use of Georgian airspace for the Russian Air Force during the first Chechen War.[4]

Tskhinvali was controlled by the Ossetian separatists with no Georgian writ, and Georgia never viewed Russian peacekeepers as impartial.[5] Throughout the 1990s, Georgian authorities were ambivalent toward the breakaway

provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, oscillating between the promise of a peaceful negotiated settlement with autonomy, and military threats whenever the overtures were rejected.[6] While there were no direct and official military actions taken on either side, proxy forces often exchanged fire, most notably in 1998 and 2001.[7] In 1998, guerrilla groups supported by the Georgian government attacked Abkhazian positions, and in 2001, a proxy war was led by the Chechen rebels under Ruslan Gelayev and with the tacit support of the Georgian government. None of the proxy conflicts featured any active participation of Georgian or Russian forces. Throughout the 1990s, Moscow was relatively powerless to change the status quo on the ground, as it was occupied with its own conflicts, most notably in Chechnya.[8]

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RUSSIAN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN GEORGIA

Why is Georgia considered so important to Russia, and why was Russia willing to go to war in Georgia and not in some other countries? Our discussion is incomplete without an understanding of the strategic importance of Georgia to Russia. Russian interest in Georgia was strategic as well as political. Strategically, Russia sought to maintain military facilities as well as keep Georgia a part of the CIS, to continue a Russian post-soviet sphere of influence.[9] The Russian government considered Georgia to be a bulwark of stability against periodic instability in the Transcaucasus.[10] Instability and the Chechen uprising influenced the Russian decision-making process, as successive Russian governments have consistently argued that Russia needs a "friendly" Georgia.[11] However, a segment of the Russian military had always been willing to dismember Georgia until 1993. With Georgian overtures toward Russia a period of stability ensued, Russia established bases in Batumi, Alkhalkalai, and Gidauta, with airborne and infantry troops presenting a lever of political influence over Georgian foreign policy, in exchange for Russia's implicit support of the Georgian government as a net security provider in the region in the face of an Abkhazian separatism and other instability. The Russian government at this stage, and through much of the 1990s, was opposed to any separatism in the region, fearful that it might bolster a separatist movement within Russia.[12]

The immediate Russian foreign policy was focused first on localizing conflicts and isolating unstable elements, preventing them from spilling over and affecting Russia's ongoing conflict, and second, on preventing a power vacuum in the region.[13] Russian parliamentary statements highlighted this line, stating that the immediate priority of Russia was "to stop the bloodshed in Abkhazia, not to allow the spirit of aggression and war to spread to the North Caucasus."[14] Chechnya in particular was a stimulus behind Russian

strategic thinking, as the speaker of the Council of Federation, Vladimir Shumeiko, declared that the Russian position on Abkhazia was changing, and Russia was unlikely to accept an Abkhaz independence, as that might lead to other forms of separatism.[15]

While superficially, the Russian foreign-policy establishment and the military had operational differences, the overall strategic and political objectives were remarkably similar. For example, the MFA was focused on a political fait accompli, by placing Russian troops and "peacekeepers" in Georgia as a means of leveraging Russian interests, while the Russian defense ministry was focused on defining the strategic interests first and rejected any deployment without clear coordination. But both rejected the creation of a separate independent Abkhazia, facing Russia's own separatism, and they viewed the Georgian situation as an opportunity to secure Russian territorial interests.[16] For example, in 1993, General Pavel Grachev, the Russian defense minister, stated, "I will only say that this is a strategically important area for the Russian army. We have certain strategic interests here and must take every measure to ensure that our troops remain: otherwise, we will lose the Black Sea."[17]

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Accordingly, Russia and Georgia signed CIS initial documents, an economic charter, and the Collective Security Treaty, aimed at institutionalizing Georgia's part in a Russia-dominated security balance in the region.[18] Part of that included Russian control of the port of Poti, and the Bombara airfield, as well as three military airbases, "peacekeeping battalions" drawn from mostly Russian troops already inside Georgia, as well as talks between Russia and Georgia on developing common air-defense systems.[19] Shevardnadze, faced with an insurgency, agreed to lease military bases and ports to Russia, and was in turn guaranteed safety by Russia. Russian Black Sea Fleet marines retook Poti and supported Georgian troops in countering the insurgency, as the Russian government noted that a united Georgia was in the Russian interest, as a disintegrated Georgia would instigate copycat insurgencies.[20]

Russian forces were not peacekeepers in the classical sense of the term, and their positioning was purely for geopolitical purposes.[21] There was little coordination between Russian forces and the United Nations observer mission in Georgia, and the lack of any UN oversight on the Russian forces was accepted as part of the process, by both the UN envoy Eduard Brunner, who stated that Russia wouldn't permit any control or interference over the troops, and the Russian side, with Colonel-General Kondratyev echoing a similar sentiment, declaring Russian troops to be free and the Russian force presence being an agreed-upon CIS operation.[22]

When Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, a change of strategy, and the restoration of Russia's power were evident in the region.[23] As discussed in previous chapters, the Russian economy improved around the same time,

powered by oil and gas prices, as did rapid Russian military rearmament. In a similar fashion to what occurred with Ukraine, and more broadly, Europe, Russian oil and gas were used as weapons of coercion in Georgia, as well, as a sign of a new Russian assertiveness. Gazprom, the Russian gas monopoly, doubled the gas prices for Georgia from $110 per a thousand cubic meters, to $230, the highest for any former Soviet republic, as a response to the Rose revolution, while also banning Georgian mineral water and wine. Georgians perceived these acts as political. But overall, tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi were minimal from 1992 to 2004.[24]

THE ROSE REVOLUTION AND RUSSIAN REACTION

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In November 2003, Mikhail Saakashvili stormed the Parliament with his followers, and a subsequent peaceful revolution brought down the post-soviet-era leadership of President Eduard Shevardnadze. The revolution followed generic unrest in the region and was quickly followed by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, discussed in the previous chapter. Denounced by Moscow, which was worried about the changing balance of the region, this was a part of a few movements led by young, Euro-oriented, liberal leaders who were opposed to the status quo. The shifts after the Rose revolution and during the lead-up to the war presents evidence for us to explore the first puzzle. The change in Georgian behavior led Russia to believe that the threat to its strategic stability was increasing, with an increased Georgian offensive capability and offensive intention. That, in turn, led Russia to commit to balancing behavior, and eventually, with Georgian intervention in the breakaway provinces, to war. After the short war, with the strategic stability restored and the perceived threat from Georgia neutralized, Russia returned to its previous status-quo posture.

The major geopolitical shifts in the region, however, were already in motion, starting in 1997, when the Georgian government concluded to construct oil pipelines as a measure of strategic independence, which, completed in 1998, provided an alternative to Russian proposals of transporting oil via Russia.[25] Georgian discussions with Ukraine and Azerbaijan on "strategic partnerships" also blunted Russian policy toward the CIS states.[26] Simultaneously, Georgian conciliatory policies toward the EU and NATO were anathema to the Russian political and military elite.[27] EU countries were heavily dependent on Russian energy, and energy as a part of a negotiating strategy was an essential component of the Russian external security policy.

Georgian and Russian relations started to fray around the same time a new government was established in Georgia after the Rose revolution, as well

as Georgia's rebuffing of the Russian desire to privatize and monopolize oil transport via Gazprom.[28] As a countermeasure, a number of states and organizations began efforts to end Russia's monopoly on the transport of energy supplies in the region by creating alternative pipelines and routes, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines between Georgia and Turkey, a NATO member, as well as the Nabucco gas pipeline between the EU, Georgia, and Turkey.[29] This development required a change in the Russian security posture, as stability in the Caucasus was a vital requirement for the uninterrupted transport of Caspian oil and gas—the Caspian Sea region contains around 4 to 6 percent of the world's oil and gas reserves. The Russian armed forces were the net security provider in the region, and that includes the task of protecting the energy sources and offshore platforms, as well as CIS-initiated anti-terror efforts. With the development of the new pipelines, and with the involvement of Turkey and the EU, the Russian strategic monopoly was threatened, as it would have been NATO's duty according to the new arrangement to secure the BTC pipeline from Turkey. Simultaneously, a Georgian interest in having the United States train Georgian troops—who were tasked with the protection of the pipelines—changed the dynamic of the region.[30]

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THE RUSSIAN BALANCING ACTION

The Russian reaction to these changes corroborates the theory in two ways, as discussed below. First, with the increase of perceived Georgian belligerence, it was interpreted in Russia as an increase in offensive intention. Second, Georgian actions, their military and infrastructure buildup, as well as Georgian overt moves to shift away from Moscow toward the EU and NATO, were interpreted in Russia as an immediate increase in aggressive power and the source of a threat moving closer to the Russian strategic interests.[31]

Tensions started to increase with the election of President Saakashvili in 2004, who promptly committed his country to NATO and the EU, as well as the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while proclaiming publicly that his government was committed to restore central writ on Georgia's "lost territories."[32] These rapid changes happened—similar to the ones in Ukraine, discussed in detail in the previous chapter—around the same time as Moscow's tensions with the United States and the European Union started to rise over the Iraq War and democracy promotion, as well as the color revolutions in the Russian "sphere of influence," an outcome that was watched with alarm from Moscow.[33] Georgia's Rose revolution ushered in a new government, which was promptly embraced by the United States and the EU.[34] In turn, the new Saakashvili government started a slow orientation toward the Euro-Atlantic

security structure, including telegraphing a desire to become a member of both the European Union and NATO. In addition, it simultaneously began to distance itself from Moscow centric economic organizations. Georgia was also hailed by both the EU and the United States as a beacon of democracy compared to Russia, which was considered corrupt.[35] The 2006 Freedom House report, for example, ranked Georgia above Russia in seven of eight indicators of political rights and civil liberties.[36] The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index also ranked Georgia as "transparent" compared to Russia.[37]

The Georgian government under Saakashvili was also comparatively more assertive than the revolutionary regime in Ukraine. In 2006, Tbilisi arrested four Russian military intelligence officers in Georgia for espionage, prompting Russia to close all air, sea, and land transport links to Georgia and deploy armored forces in the border of South Ossetia.[38] Saakashvili was clear about his dual attempt of changing the status quo and balance of power that had existed in the region since the Georgian secession from the Soviet Union, first, by propelling his country toward the EU and NATO, and second, by building strategic infrastructure with an aim to eventually retake control of the breakaway rebel provinces.

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In theoretical terms, Saakashvili proceeded on a course of "internal balancing." For example, while opening a highway, he commented, "This is a historic day because for the first time in Georgia, in our history, a modern, high-quality, world-standard motorway is being built that will link Tbilisi and Tskhinvali in 2008. . . . During the first term of our presidency, my presidency, I am planning to complete Tbilisi-Tskhinvali highway and during the second term finally to complete the Tbilisi-Sukhumi motorway. So, now I declare the construction of the Tbilisi-Tskhinvali-Sukhumi motorway open. Today is 15 March 2006. In 2008, we will travel to Tskhinvali by this road, and in 2010, or at the beginning of 2011 at the latest, this road will take us to Sukhumi . . . ," rhetoric that was duly noted in Moscow.[39]

As discussed previously in the Ukraine chapter, around the same time that Ukraine was undergoing rapid changes, the Rose revolution in Georgia also brought a transformation that changed the Russian strategic dynamic. The revolutionary changes in Georgia were a dual project that attempted to modernize Georgia and orient it toward the EU and NATO security architecture, as well as bring about the territorial reunification of forces. In President Saakashvili's own words in 2006, it was a historic opportunity to join Tbilisi with Tskhinvalli and Sukhumi, with the construction of modern highways.[40] While Saakashvili was noted for his bombastic personality, his pronouncements added to the confusion.[41]

Alongside Saakashvili's rapid transformation of the Georgian military, he established two modern brigade level bases in Senaki, near Abkhazia,

and in Gori, near South Ossetia. The Georgian military budget dramatically rose from USD fifty million in 2003, to USD six hundred million in 2007, and almost USD one billion in 2008.[42] This increase, from USD fifty million during the Rose revolution, to USD one billion by 2008, came with the official justification that the defense budget increase was needed to upgrade the Georgian military to NATO standards.[43] US training programs were undertaken, and Israeli weaponry, usually used for anti-access/area denial, including drones, anti-air systems, and military helicopters, were procured for that purpose.[44] The Georgian government was frank about the increase of the defense budget, and the official explanation was that it was needed to upgrade the Georgian military to NATO standards, as a pathway to its future intended membership with the Western alliance.[45]

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Georgia's procurement of large-scale weapons, including battle tanks, artillery, Israeli drones and anti-air systems, and American military helicopters—Georgia's collaboration with the United States in training programs—resulted in a massive security dilemma for Russia, with the addition of offensive capability in Georgian forces changing the dynamic of the region.[46] The Georgian policy toward the breakaway provinces changed to a more assertive and belligerent posturing, with sporadic incursions by Georgian forces into those territories.[47] Geopolitical changes started taking place, as well; in May 2004, right after Saakashvili took power, massive military pressure and buildup took place on the Abkhazian border, which lasted till July, when severe clashes between Georgian and South Ossetian forces occurred with dozens of casualties. For example, in May 2004, a few months after the Rose revolution, Georgian troops forced a rebel leader to leave Adjara, an autonomous province.[48] Meanwhile the Saakashvili administration pushed for alternative governments, and in 2006, Georgian troops raided Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia to remove a local rebel. The Georgian government also pushed for an 'alternative government' in South Ossetia under Dmitri Sanakoev, in an open attempt to stir up the dormant province and push toward reunification, against the Moscow-sponsored government of Eduard Kokoity.[49] In 2006, Georgian troops entered the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia, during a joint military-police operation, to remove a rebel leader, and a pro-Georgian Abkhazian government in exile was established there.[50] Georgia also arrested four Russian army officers on charges of espionage. These were clear signals from Georgia that the intention was not just to replace rebels, but to unite Georgia, as well as to work toward integration with the EU and NATO.[51] A number of modern military bases were established during this period, especially two strategic ones—in Senaki, a chokepoint near Abkhazia; and in Gori, near South Ossetia—with each brigade having a capacity of three thousand soldiers.[52]

Moscow's reactions reflected the changed calculus.[53] Earlier in 2006, in the face of renewed Georgian assertiveness, Russian president Putin warned

there could be a "bloodbath" in its breakaway regions, as the issue was not limited to Russian peacekeepers already present and Georgia, but it included South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He added, "To our regret and fear, it is heading for a bloodbath. Georgia wants to resolve the disputes with military action." The arrest of Russian officers prompted Putin to comment that the "initiative to worsen relations originated not from Russia."[54] Former defense minister Sergey Ivanov accused NATO of propping up Georgia and warned against Georgia's inadequate actions against Russian personnel.[55] Russia also recalled its ambassador from Georgia.[56] The chairman of the State Duma committee on the CIS, Andrei Kokoshin, accused NATO of pulling Georgia into its orbit as a means of pushing Russia out of its sphere of influence. In his statements to the State Duma, Kokoshin mentioned that Russia has "more than enough political, economic, and socio-cultural reasons to be negative about admission of these countries to NATO. Our military-strategic concerns are also growing."[57] Russia started to view the Rose revolution as a coup orchestrated by the EU and NATO, with the single strategic aim of encouraging Georgia to be belligerent toward Moscow and destabilize Russia's strategic sphere.[58]

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Evidence therefore suggests that Georgia's Rose revolution and the rapid westward shift fueled a political and strategic counter-reaction from Russia. Especially the declared Georgian desires, its actions, its new orientation toward embracing Euro-Atlantic security and economic structures, and its desire to replace Russia's troops as the net security provider of the region—all were perceived as an emerging and sudden threat, and the pace of their development blindsided the Russian strategic community.[59] Economic steps were also taken by Moscow to delegitimize the new Georgian government. In 2006, imports of Georgian wine and mineral waters—Georgia's two leading exports to Russia—were banned, on the grounds that they failed to meet Russian health standards.[60] In the same year, in October, in retaliation for the arrest of four Russian officers charged with espionage, the Russian government introduced broader sanctions, suspended all transport and postal service links, and relaunched visa checks, and the background information-gathering of ethnic Georgians, and the roundup and deportation of any ethnic Georgians from a number of Russian cities.[61] As with Ukraine after the Orange revolution, Gazprom doubled the price of gas exports to Georgia in November 2006.[62]

Political pressure from Moscow included the Russian government's increasingly overt support of unrecognized separatist regimes in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[63] By 2006, the Russian state duma expressed its support for the independence aspirations of the breakaway provinces under Russian peacekeepers.[64] In February 2007, in one of the strongest threats, Russia's ambassador to Tbilisi, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, publicly warned Georgia to adopt a status of political and military neutrality, which was, in effect, a threat

implying that Georgia stood to lose political control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia unless it desisted from its efforts to join NATO.[65] Simultaneously, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, declared the prospect of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO to be "unacceptable" to Moscow, and in a speech in March that year to the Russian Duma, Lavrov for the first time referred to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria as "republics."[66] Soon after, official Russian documents began referring to the leaders of the provinces as presidents.[67] The evidence of Russian military preparedness is tricky and provides conflicting narratives. By all accounts, the Russian military was prepared for a war, but it was not anticipating a Georgian attack. For example, the Russian 58th Army movement toward the Georgian border, and in South Ossetia, demonstrates a level of readiness that could be construed as preparation by the Russian leadership for an eventual full-scale war. In May 2008, Russian troops were deployed to repair rail networks that would be utilized in the future for rapid logistics and troop transport.[68] In April 2008, Moscow deployed an additional two thousand troops in Abkhazia as peacekeepers. Russia's North Caucasus Military District was in a state of full operational readiness, and around eight thousand troops were stationed there to conduct exercises between July and August.[69] There were also reports that Russia was transporting air defense components and rocket systems to Abkhazia all through the spring.[70] Repeated Russian provocations were part of a coercive strategy, including sending three thousand Russian troops to Abkhazia, the shooting down of a Georgian drone, and in a pointed signal, a violation of Georgian airspace by Russian jets before the visit of US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice.[71] The most important signal, as well as an indication of potential war preparation, was the Kavkaz-2008 military exercise in July 2008, a month before the war, meant to prepare Russian forces to launch a quick intervention and assist Russian peacekeeping troops, in South Ossetia, from a Georgian attack.[72] The exercises also came immediately after the joint US-Georgian war games' "Immediate Response—2008."[73]

Separatists in Ossetia and Abkhazia were also preparing themselves for an inevitable conflict with Georgia.[74] Russia started to distribute Russian passports to a large population of South Ossetians, and a Russian citizen, a resident of Moscow, was elected president of South Ossetia.[75] Moscow controlled all the security personnel in the South Ossetian administration, which was seen by Georgia as a de-facto annexation by Russia. This spiral was accentuated by a Russian presidential decree in April 2008 that established direct official Russian relations with the South Ossetian and Abkhaz authorities.[76] In the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008, the North Atlantic Council, while rejecting the membership action plans for Georgia and Ukraine, agreed

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that eventually, both "will become members of NATO" and stated that "therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level."[77]

The situation deteriorated rapidly in August, as Georgian positions were targeted sporadically by Ossetian militias, leading to Georgia accusing Russia of being complicit in allowing Ossetian mercenaries and transport military hardware through the strategic Roki tunnel.[78] Russia, in turn, accused Georgia of a massive buildup of troops and armor in preparation for war. On August 7, Georgian troops started shelling an Ossetian position, which led to open combat between Georgian forces and Russian peacekeepers.[79] Beyond any doubt, the first shots of this conflict were fired from the Georgian side, and they led to a massive, and disproportionate, retaliation from Russia, which resulted in a Georgian defeat in a short, punitive war.[80]

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In sum, the combined Georgian actions, and the resultant reaction from Moscow, corroborates the theory. The new Georgian government after the Rose revolution categorically started to move Tbilisi away from Moscow toward a more Western alliance and economic and security structure. Georgian military buildup; the import of their offensive weapons capability; training exercises with Western, and especially American, troops; and Saakashvili's rhetorical belligerence—all resulted in a rapid decline of strategic balance in the region. The Georgian arrest of Russian spies, its infrastructure buildup toward the breakaway provinces, and its sporadic acts of aggression resulted in Moscow's own military buildup and preparation for an eventual conflict. Then, when Georgian forces attacked the rebel provinces, which included Russian troops, Moscow reacted overwhelmingly to restore the balance.

AFTER THE INVASION: RUSSIA AS A STATUS-QUO POWER

The second theoretical puzzle is whether Russia acted as an expansionist power or a security maximiser. Current literature on the Georgian war is silent on this theoretical question. Evidence explored suggests that Russia was thoroughly unprepared for the eventual conflict, even though it had an inclination that the situation might lead to conflict. Second, the Russian forces lacked the capability to occupy Georgia. Third, the Russian leadership chose to act as a status-quo power, and they took the advantage of withdrawing, once the perceived strategic threat was neutralized and the strategic balance was restored.

While it is accepted that Georgia was the side that initiated the actual conflict, the counter-narratives suggest that Russia forced Georgia's hand, through its continued provocations.[81] A miscalculation from the Georgian side about Western military assistance also resulted in further adventurism.[82] However,

the Russian military preparedness, operational process, and endgame also sheds light on the Russian strategic aims, which in turn answers some key theoretical questions. Russian military preparedness during the buildup to the war, as discussed above, indicated there was a certain sense of impending conflict among the Russian military and foreign-policy circles. Despite the preparedness, the timing of the conflict took Russia by surprise. All evidence suggests that Russia was not actually ready for the conflict to start when it did, and the suddenness of the Georgian assault was unexpected in Moscow. Evidence also suggests that the Russian military never intended to occupy Georgia.[83]

On August 7, 2008, after weeks of tensions the Georgian military launched an assault on the South Ossetian units. The Russian senior officers were simply unavailable at the time of the assault during the popular August vacation period, signifying a lack of anticipation, and indeed operational planning. The then–prime minister Vladimir Putin was attending the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics when the first shots were fired, and the Russian news reported that the defense minister, Serdyukov, was unavailable for comment for over ten hours after the hostilities began, as he was vacationing on the coast of the Black Sea.[84] The senior officer corps were on leave, which was then subsequently cancelled and revoked. The retired head of the Defense Ministry's Main Operations Directorate had to be brought back under special intervention from the political leaders.[85]

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The Russian military chain of command also experienced unforeseen anomalies, which were evident from the Russian operations. While the 58th Army was prepositioned, the 102nd Army brigade and the armor corps, the artilleries, and the systems needed for a ground invasion were not available for over a day, which suggested a lack of strategic forethought, or unpreparedness.[86] The unavailability of the senior political leadership suggests there was a lack of intelligence about Georgia's offensive intentions. Likewise, it was not a case of strategic deception, as that would not entail the senior leadership rushing back to Moscow, including Vladimir Putin, who had to cut short his Beijing trip. There were also discrepancies in the Russian force posture, which suggests a lack of coordination, as well as planning.

The argument that Russia was not prepared for an expansionist war is bolstered by the evidence. The Russian counterattack included a mix of offensive and defensive assets, which indicates some level of confusion among the Russian military ranks regarding the purpose of the force. The offensive force included Russian Tu-22 Backfire bombers and Su-24s Fencer and Su-27 Flanker attack aircraft, which were expected to be part of any invasion force. They simultaneously conducted raids over Gori, Rustavi, and near the capital of Tbilisi.[87] The lack of support systems, the heavy loss of Russian aircraft, and the inability to operationalize air dominance was

also visible. Bombing and artillery fire, especially with missile systems like SS-21 Tochka, which are primarily used as defensive weapons, was concentrated not just in military centers or as a strategy of invasion, but in areas close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, which were not related to the Georgian forces; they were out of operational zones, and this indicated a punitive intention rather than one of deterrence or a continuing invasion.[88] There were no actions taken by the Russian Navy, which is unusual for an invading force or troop movements, other than the Black Sea Fleet's hurried organization in order to blockade the coast of Poti and Sukhumi.[89] The Russian military strategy was primarily defensive and punitive, and it included setting up buffer zones in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which were already under de-facto Russian control, rather than rapid thrusts into enemy territory. Crippling Russian bombing on Georgian command and control also indicated the punitive nature of the war.[90]

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Simultaneously, there is extensive evidence of intelligence and coordination failure, suggesting a lack of planning. The Russian army units lacked basic kits, and the interoperability of radios between the army and air force was unusual for an invading force.[91] Russian officers even had to use the satellite phones of embedded journalists to report to headquarters.[92] The Russian forces were seen using outdated Soviet maps, and they bombed targets and airfields that were operationally dormant and out of use, instead of new, far-more-important bases.[93] For example, the newly established military base at Gori only suffered damages from ground troops, with no attack from the Russian Air Force. The massive, clumsy Soviet-style column formations, moving slowly and relying on heft instead of speed, also showed a lack of newer methods and strategies; it was an army completely ill-prepared to face what it ostensibly considered a growing enemy, and it faced an enormous casualty rate.[94] While that may be coincidental, due to Russia's slow-paced military reforms, it somewhat makes the existence of a plan doubtful.[95] There was a complete lack of senior officer leadership during the entirety of the conflict, which resulted in Russian armor and tanks entering battle unprepared. General Makarov argued that Russia had to hurriedly handpick "colonels and generals from all over Russia."[96] Likewise, Sergei Skokov, the chief of staff during the first Chechen War, compared that to the unpreparedness of the Georgian war, saying, "[during the 'problem in the North Caucasus'] there was not a single command and control organization, formation or military unit that had been prepared and was ready that instant to begin to accomplish its missions . . . the same again occurred in Georgia."[97]

DISCREPANCY WITH RHETORIC: EVIDENCE FROM OPERATIONS

Moscow consistently maintained that the Georgian war was defensive and retaliatory, and in response to Georgia's "treacherous and massive attack" on the rebel provinces, and on the locally deployed Russian peacekeeping contingent. Therefore, they claimed, they were reacting to an act of war forced upon Russia that it did not desire.[98] Tbilisi maintained that the Georgian government's hand had been forced by a Russian troop buildup and that Georgia had not anticipated such a massive Russian military counterattack, miscalculating the Russian resolve. But that claim is debatable, as Georgia was repeatedly warned by the United States not to provoke Russia into a war.[99] Russia's counterargument was that the "illegal use of force by Georgia" against Russian troops had violated international norms and was an "act of war" against the Russian Federation, justifying self-defense actions under international law.[100] The justification of the war from the Russian side was twofold. Initially, Russian president Medvedev stated that Russia had the right to self-defense against Georgia's attacks on Russian troops, which were "gross violations, of the mandates that the international community gave Russia in the peace process."[101] The 58th army was called as a reinforcement to the Russian peacekeeping contingent. As the war went on, the peacekeeping argument also morphed, and Moscow declared that Russian operations were now "peace coercion" operations, to neutralize enemy assaults.[102] Medvedev also asserted that 'nobody is questioning the principle of territorial integrity' in international law, but that 'the question is one of a specific situation in a specific country.'[103] Over time, the Russian narrative changed and mirrored the Western narrative of stopping "genocide," taking on a humanitarian character. Russian leaders, including Putin and Lavrov, described the intent of the military operations as the prevention of violations of international humanitarian laws, similar to the NATO rationale for intervening in the Balkans. Lavrov argued that Russian laws made it "unavoidable for Russia to exercise the responsibility to protect."[104] Lavrov stated, "Russia will not allow the death of its compatriots to go unpunished . . . the life and dignity of our citizens, wherever they are, will be protected"—a statement echoed by Russia's NATO envoy: "the issue of using military force to protect our citizens is a matter of principle,' albeit 'within the framework of the humanitarian aim of saving peoples."[105] While recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian top leadership maintained that "every state has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence."

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But Russian actions did not reflect the bombastic rhetoric, suggesting that regime change or an occupation of Georgia was not the plan, and that Russia was either satisfied by the objective of dividing Georgia, or deterred by the withering military losses. Even with the extreme lack of coordination and the lack of an integrated combat plan, the large Russian contingents eventually managed to overpower their rival forces. Russian tactics changed as the war went on, with the deployment of motor-rifle divisions and heavy armor and troops from beyond the North Caucasus Military District. The 76th Air Assault Division was brought from the Leningrad Military District and airlifted in a hurried fashion, signifying that the exact timing of the intervention was not according to Moscow's choosing. There was no visible concentration of armored and airborne forces prior to the commencement of hostilities. While Russia had forces ready for an eventual hostility in Abkhazia—a terrain of choice for the Russian military command of a short punitive campaign—with the Georgian retaliation, Moscow had to spread the operational theatre of war to South Ossetia. An important piece of evidence consistent with this scenario was the mission conducted by Russian railroad troops during the June–July 2008 repair of the strategic railway to Abkhazia, to move armor in case of a conflict. Similar actions were not evident in the case of South Ossetia.

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The start of the war saw Russian forces mirroring ancient Soviet strategies of amassing overwhelming numbers, along with troop movement in one column; however, this brought about overwhelming casualties for a great power in a battle with a relative smaller power.[106] The Russian air campaign involved over three hundred combat aircraft, but the campaign was unable to achieve air dominance even on the day the war ended, as Georgian anti-air operations were not subdued.[107] Russian troops managed to rapidly disperse over swathes of undisputed Georgian territories, and the conflict was not localized in just South Ossetia and Abkhazia. One can surmise that this was necessary, as Russia had no option of clear dominance over Georgian forces, but instead had to isolate and spread them out to rely on the numbers. Russia accordingly transferred over nine thousand troops to Abkhazia to recapture the upper Kodori Valley from Georgian control, alongside massive artillery and aerial bombardment campaigns in other parts of the conflict to keep Georgian forces occupied and dispossessing them of the means to concentrate defenses. Russian mechanized troops opened up new fronts in undisputed UN security zones.[108] The town of Zugdid and the Georgian military base in Senaki, established under Saakashvili, were occupied, and the main roads and railways were taken under control. The Black Sea port of Poti was captured, denying Georgia the means for any sea-based mobilization. During the duration of the war, Russia fielded around forty thousand troops, compared to around twelve thousand Georgian troops, and Russia relied on numbers

and weight to achieve theatre dominance and overwhelm a relatively smaller opponent.[109] Russian artillery and aircraft assaults were also massive and unspecified, compared to the more precise strikes that were practiced by her Western counterparts. With Georgia receiving no Western assistance, or force movements, or support, by the end of a week, even with operational problems, Russia was in the driving seat of the conflict, with more or less complete control of the strategic chokepoints, ports, and rail routes that were potentially useful for an invasion force.

The Russian operation was officially declared to be over on the August 12, after six days of full-spectrum conflict, as a six-point ceasefire was agreed upon under the mediation of French president Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian president Medvedev, which was also signed by the Georgian leader Saakashvili after rapid negotiations were spearheaded by France.[110] Russian president Medvedev declared that Russian "objectives" were achieved. Moscow insisted that Russia was within its rights to take "extra security measures" to deter future threats, which is open to a broad interpretation. Russian foreign minister Lavrov suggested that Russia was within its rights to "determine just which areas of Georgia must be demilitarized and placed under control."[111] Accordingly, Russian forces were seen to patrol the military bases, ports, and towns of Gori, Senaki, and Poti, and Russian units took control of registering and securing surrendered weapons and hardware. The ceasefire reestablished Russia's role as the peacekeeper and net security provider of the region, and accordingly, the formation of "security zones"—in essence, buffer zones—between disputed territories and undisputed Georgia was unilaterally and arbitrarily determined by Moscow. The buffer zones of security were not concentrated in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but in practice, they were all over central Georgia, including the roads and highways connected under Saakashvili between the eastern and western parts of the country.

The Russian military established observation posts both inside and bordering the South Ossetian administrative zone, which were only dismantled after EU negotiations started, for the Russian troops to withdraw to the positions prior to the commencement of the conflict. The Russian ministry of defense stated that the operation, which was meant to enforce peace "as a means to promote Russian security interests and protect Russian troops," had been completed successfully. The approval for the operation from the Collective Security Treaty Organization was only sought after the conflict was over, thereby marking the unilateralism that Moscow perceived was the norm after Kosovo. Russian military intelligence continued to claim that US instructors were directing and coordinating mercenaries from Ukraine and Georgia, without giving any proof, as well as noting that US forces were continuing to arm and train Georgia forces. Moscow also accused the United States of

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sending military hardware, in the name of humanitarian aid, and calling for an arms embargo.

RUSSIAN NARROW AIM OF RESTORING A STRATEGIC BALANCE

In sum, here are the key findings from this chapter, summarized. The geopolitical significance of the war was enormous, and it substantially answers the two questions. First, the Russian lead-up to the war, the conduct of the conflict, the mopping-up operations, the neutralization of threats, and the falling back to a position of the status quo all corroborate the Balance of Threat theory. On the second question, while direct evidence is scant, one can infer, from the Russian retrenchment after the conflict, that Russia was either not capable, or not willing, to occupy Georgia or instigate a regime change. Whatever that may point at, it does not make Russia an expansionist power.

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The result of the conflict was that Georgia emerged as a thoroughly vanquished and diminished state, with its military forces completely routed, and its reputation tarnished. The Rose revolution success story was of political reform, and with democracy already under strain with Saakashvili's domestic agenda, it was shattered after the war, which was blamed on Georgia by the EU. Technically it was Georgia that started the conflict, which resulted in a blow to the reliability of a Western ally and to its economy, and it earned the country a reputation of volatility.[112] Georgia lost billions of dollars in investments, military and civilian infrastructure, a deterrence potential from American training, and military equipment.[113] The Rose revolution led to centralized decision-making, which led to minimal checks and balances over the executive branch, giving a way out for Saakashvili's belligerence, which led to an ill-thought-out military campaign against the wishes of his Western allies, without any deliberation, prudence, or consultation.

That served the main purpose for Moscow. As per the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory, Moscow's chief goal was to ensure the upholding of the status quo, where Russia had a favorable position in the regional balance. The war was a Russian strategic victory. Russian troops remained in both the breakaway provinces after the ceasefire, and Moscow unilaterally recognized the independence of the provinces soon after, citing the Kosovo precedent. The primary military objectives were all achieved. The war ended Georgia's nominal sovereignty over the provinces, which Russia consistently considered as of immense strategic significance, and it resulted in Russia reestablishing itself as the primary powerbroker and net security provider in the region.

Second, Russia's primary fear was NATO expansion in Moscow's sphere of influence in the post-soviet space.[114] As mentioned in the previous chapters, Russia had long declared Georgia and Ukraine to be the red lines for NATO enlargement, and turning Georgia into a permanent simmering conflict zone entailed that Georgia's accession to NATO would be indefinitely forestalled. Georgia's newly gained reputation as a volatile government, prone to conflict, also meant that the EU and NATO countries were now skeptical of adding Georgia to the alliance.[115] Russia thereby managed to achieve a balance of power and parity and the stability of a cold conflict zone. Previously, it had been considered just a matter of time before both Georgia and Ukraine would be a part of the Atlantic alliance, as put forth by the NATO membership action plan of 2008. While NATO members publicly stated that they intended to see Georgia become a member, there were many private reservations about further ties with Georgia risking a potential conflict with Russia. The conflict served the strategic purpose of making NATO unlikely to be interested in a country with a frozen conflict.[116] However, while Russia's military campaign was successful overall, it demonstrated flaws in operation and showcased deep-rooted problems in every single domain, providing the impetus for long-term reforms. A massive long-term rearmament was begun under Medvedev, with the Russian forces particularly focusing on command-and-control breakdown and force mobilization in the South Ossetian conflict, and this accounted for a 27 percent increase in defense in 2009, a year after the war.

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The Russian offensive was rhetorically justified as a "peace creation" operation, rather than UN-mandated peacekeeping, and it is unlikely Russia ever intended to completely defeat the Georgian forces or change the regime. The Russian force concentration, as discussed above, was insufficient. The Russian military was unprepared for a full-scale invasion, and it conducted all operations with minimal force, then scrambled to deploy additional troops picked and chosen from different parts of the country on an ad-hoc basis. The seizure of Tbilisi and the occupation of Georgia were never in the cards—partly, one can assume, because it wasn't planned, and partly because Russia was incapable of a long-term occupation force, as the Russian economy was on a severe and crippling downturn. Russians did not anticipate the ongoing global financial collapse, as well, and the Russian economy had already been slowing since July 2008, and now there was increasing capital flight due to the war.

The ousting of Saakashvili and regime change was, therefore, not a primary objective, and Moscow settled for strategic restraint, the condemnation of Georgia, and a return to the status quo.[117] This solved a few problems. Russia sought to create a new fait accompli, and it attained its objective of stopping Georgia's new revolutionary regime from turning westward.

Unresolved geostrategic issues and frozen conflict was enough for Russia to stop Georgia's ascension to both the EU and NATO; neither of those organizations was willing to offer any security guarantee to such a volatile threat. Militarization of the regions forced a new "fact on the ground" and removed the ambiguity of the Russian peacekeeping forces, while forcing the breakaway provinces to a new dependency on Russia. As Medvedev stated, there are regions in which Russia has a privileged interest and are home to countries that share special historical relations.[118] This terming of the region in civilizational terms betrays a narrow realpolitik that was achieved with a NATO divided over the issue of Georgia.

In sum, the Russian foreign policy and military use of force in Georgia suggest that Russia was satisfied to carve out its privileged position in the region and use force to uphold the status quo. Second, Russia was not interested in occupying Georgia, and it followed the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory, retreating once the perceived threat was neutralized.

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Conclusion

The Sources of Russian Aggression

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The task of summarizing findings of a theoretical project attempting to explore the foreign policy of a great power is daunting—even more so if the great power in question is secretive, and if the events studied for evidence are fluid and ongoing. It is also futile to claim that any single theory of international relations can provide a complete interpretation, as foreign policy is rarely monocausal. However, patterns emerge, and the purpose of any theory is to simplify complex phenomena.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the current literature and conventional wisdom about Russian foreign policy in Europe and balancing behavior is heavily tilted toward liberal democratic theories focusing on the domestic politics of Russia, regime stability, diversionary war, and some constructivist theories that focus on the honor and ideology of great powers, like Christian conservatism. There were no broad, overarching, long-term, strategic analyses that considered the theoretical questions and tried to explain them.

However, an IR theory is as good as its explanatory power, and there were instances when conventional wisdom fell short. Russia displays no mindless expansionism in every theatre everywhere, and the idea that any and all incidents of NATO expansion lead Moscow to aggressive balancing behavior fails to explain why Russia chose conflict in Ukraine and Georgia, and not in Montenegro, the Baltics, or Macedonia. What considerations tilted the Russian decision to go to war in Ukraine and Georgia? It is not explained satisfactorily in the current academic literature. Likewise, the idea that the Russian military aggression is predicated on Vladimir Putin's declining domestic popularity also never sought to explain the timing of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia with Putin's popularity sky-high both times, according to neutral polls taken by independent pollsters like Levada. The theory that Moscow uses diversionary warfare to polish over domestic economic fragility also does not explain the differences in 2008 and 2014—in the former case, when Russia was economically sound and experiencing a phase of boom, and in the latter case, when Russia was reeling. And finally,

the constructivist theories of national pride, honor, and Orthodox-Christian imperialism also severely lack explanatory power. First, these frameworks are arbitrary. Second, it never explains what stops Russian militarism, or alternatively, what explains the Russian return to the status quo after every instance of military aggression. To give one recent example, if the Russian aggression of Ukraine was prompted by the idea of establishing Novorossiya, an imperial entity in line with Russian historical regional hegemony, Moscow would not logically stop expanding. In reality, Russia's military aggression was limited in scope, capability, nature, and territorial depth. The rhetoric of Novorossiya was quietly dropped in the media after a few months.

In that context, the theoretical framework here has a better explanatory power, in understanding the discrepancies of post-soviet Russian foreign policy and military aggression in Europe. The aim was not to provide an overarching theory of Russian foreign policy. That is beyond the limited scope or capability of one single PhD dissertation. Rather, this book aimed at testing a realist theory within the broad realist framework. While realism is a philosophical framework as well as a research design, there are various realist IR theories within the broad framework that are used to measure or understand various aspects of state behavior and foreign policy.

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The attempt was made to study Russian recorded military actions, balancing behavior, and official rhetoric to match the independent variables. Accordingly, the theory predicts a specific set of behavioral patterns. For example, aggregate power in a rival state or institution—that is, the combination of total industrial and military resources—would alter the perception of a state, and a higher or growing aggregate power would result in internal balancing, an arms race, or a search for allies. The political debates should have subsequently reflected those considerations and acknowledged the need to balance. Geographical proximity would also alter the regional balance and threat perceptions, in the sense that if a perceived threat moves closer, the threat perception would rise, and noticeable actions like repositioning weapons systems, cultivating alliances, or increased military expenditures would be observed. Finally, if a state believed these factors were combined with offensive power and weapons systems, and offensive intentions, and if the state believed that actions were existential, they would take actions, both economic and strategic, to offset that threat and balance.

To sum up, here are the broad theoretical predictions that were explored.

1. Higher aggregate power in a perceived strategic threat alters threat perception in Russia, and subsequently it leads to internal balancing like an arms race, or external balancing, observable in alliance behavior. That will reflect in the debates within Russian policymaking circles as well as Russian actions.

2. The Russian state, regardless of regime type and era, will feel threatened by any power or coalition with overall greater aggregate power than Russia. That would include great powers, alliances, and coalitions.
3. The threat perception will incrementally increase if the source of threat moves closer to the Russian landmass and decrease if it moves away. The threat perception will also rise if offensive power increases, and it will decrease if offensive power is replaced by defensive power. These changes will be acknowledged by the Russian policymakers, and there should be a record and reflection of that in debates and discussions.
4. A geographically closer threat with increased or increasing aggregate power will result in greater concern and an elevated threat perception in a state or great power, and that will influence its balancing or bandwagoning behavior accordingly. Russia's reaction to NATO expansion was explored to see if the causal variables are present in the events of a forceful reaction, or if one or more of them is absent in the instances of muted reaction.
5. Finally, any altered security dynamic that threatens Russia's privileged position in its neighborhood would result in Moscow's balancing behavior, and even the use of military force, *in extremis*. Alternatively, the perceived threat, when neutralized or balanced, would result in Moscow moving back to the status quo. This would also prove that Russia acts as a security maximiser, and not a power maximiser. In other words, Moscow is a status-quo and defensive realist power, and not a revanchist, offensive realist power.

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The predictions from the theories were drawn accordingly and suggest a few key considerations. Higher aggregate power in a rival would always lead to internal balancing, arms race, and altered threat perceptions, and the Russian state, regardless of regime type and era, would feel threatened by any power and coalition with overall higher aggregate power—and that would include any great power, nation state, or alliances. Any threat perception would incrementally increase if a threat was considered encroaching upon Russian strategic interests, and it would decrease if it was considered moving away. The threat perception would also increase if offensive power in a rival is increasing, and it would decrease if offensive power is replaced by defensive power. Perceived and observable offensive intention or rhetoric would increase the threat perception in Moscow, regardless of actual power or capability in a rival state. All these would be reflected in Russian political decision-making, and balancing actions would commence, for as long as the threat remains, and it would subside when the threat is considered diminished. All these assumptions, accordingly, lead to observable actions. In Russia's case, if Russia's neighbors lean toward NATO and the EU, it would

be considered by Moscow to be an increasing threat, whereupon a rival institution or power is slowly encroaching toward the Russian sphere of influence and threatening Moscow's strategic interests, like naval ports, defense supply chains, defensible terrains, military bases, economic and export interests, etc., and accordingly, Russia would take every action to offset that threat. Any instability in Moscow's neighborhood that will have Western support would be considered to be Western measures, including propaganda and penetration, and the threat perceptions will rise. All else being equal, these will be reflected in Russian actions, and Russian balancing actions would increase or subside depending on the perception of the center or threat moving toward the Russian landmass.

So, what should have been the observable actions on Moscow's part? Ukraine's move toward a security infrastructure with NATO or the EU would be considered a threat by Russia and would be, in turn, considered an encroachment of a rival power in Moscow's neighborhood, which would destabilize local balance of power. There would be a distinct, observable threat to material or strategic losses that would be existential to Russia's aggregate power and great power status. Russia would undertake every balancing action to offset those losses for as long as the threat remained, and it would only cease when, from Moscow's perspective, those losses diminished. Likewise, Georgia's shift toward a rival alliance would result in a balancing action from Russia, and any belligerence from Tbilisi would be considered an offensive intention that alters the security scenario and balance of the region, and it would result in direct action from Moscow for as long as the threat remained. Russia would only return to the status quo when the threat is perceived from Moscow to be over and the order of alignment of the region unchanged.

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In simple theoretical terms, the findings should reflect these assumptions: Russia should attempt to balance any threat and act as a realist power. Alternatively, Russia's return to the status quo whenever the perception of threat declines or is offset by the Russian balancing action would emphatically suggest that Russia is a defensive realist power and a security maximiser. If Russia is a power maximiser, it would act in a way consistent to unstoppable expansionism. If Russia is a security maximiser, it would be content as long as Russia's security interests remain unaltered, and the regional balance of power remains in Moscow's favor. In the former case, any Russian military operation would be contingent upon occupation forces, and it would continue, or follow a pattern contingent with regime change operations. In the latter case, the Russian military actions would cease after a time, and they would show more narrow strategic restraint, being overall limited in nature, only meant to restore a balance or offset a direct threat to interests.

That in itself is one of the key theoretical contributions from this study, and it provides future guidance for the purposes of formulating policy and grand strategy.

In all the cases observed, detailed in earlier chapters and summarized below, Russia behaved like a realist power. It weakened countries on the borderlands, and it ensured that the Russian relative power remains higher compared to her neighbors. Moscow ensured that the advance and enlargement of the EU and NATO is pushed back, and what it considers encroachment by hostile powers in Moscow's sphere of influence is stopped. Russia balanced whenever the threat was sudden and moved back to the status quo when the threats were neutralized. Russia also defended its supply chains, naval ports, military, and material interests in the regions where Russia already had a foothold. It carved out strategically defensible terrains, and created a fait accompli, even at the risk of changing the rules of the postwar European order. It undertook extreme punitive actions against smaller powers that dared to act independently, but it also moved back to the status quo when the threat of those smaller powers moving toward a hostile security infrastructure subsided. Most importantly, Moscow knew when and where to stop, in the middle of a conflict, preferring frozen conflict zones and leverage points, and it did not, from evidence observed so far, engage in mindless continuous imperial expansion.

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Here is a summary of the key findings from each case studied.

Russian Reaction to NATO Enlargement

The Russian reaction to different phases of NATO enlargement was treated as evidence to test the Balance of Threat theory. If the theory is correct, then any source of aggregate power, (institutional, alliances, or states/great powers) moving closer toward Russian borders would trigger a heightening threat perception. Closer geographic proximity might heighten the threat perception in itself, but it might or might not trigger a balancing reaction; however, the threat perception would heighten even more if the offensive capabilities of the source of the threat would increase. If, however, Moscow is satisfied there is no offensive capability or intention, then there would unlikely be any military reaction. Likewise, if Moscow is satisfied there is a lack of offensive intention, then the threat perception would not increase, and no balancing action would take place.

From the evidence observed, it can be argued that NATO's eastward enlargement was considered threatening by Russia, but the reactions to different phases of the NATO enlargement showed variations, depending in turn on NATO's offensive capability, and force posturing, as well as Russia's perception of NATO's offensive intentions. Moscow's military and

civilian elite were always opposed to NATO's enlargement, and NATO's first intended enlargement resulted in Russian alarm. Moscow, however, agreed on two conditions: that the enlargement of NATO would not result in new troops or offensive weapon systems in new member states. This was agreed between NATO and Russia and resulted in the NATO-Russia foundation act, which in turn led to a permanent joint council as Moscow allowed the theoretical expansion of Western power toward its former sphere of influence in Central Europe.

Each phase of NATO enlargement resulted in varied Russian reactions. Prior to 1993, Moscow's relative weakness was demonstrated in strategy doctrines that reflected Russia's changed nuclear posture, as well as elite acknowledgment of Russia's diminished status. The Soviet-era no-first-use policy was discarded when the NATO expansion was planned, signifying a heightened perception of a threat moving closer to Russian borders. But otherwise, Moscow's reaction was muted, due to the absence of actual movement of NATO hardware east of Germany, as well as the agreement mentioned above, which demonstrated an absence of offensive intention on NATO's part. Without any NATO troops, hardware, or permanent infrastructure in newer NATO countries, the actual balance of power did not shift in Europe, and it signified the lack of an offensive intention as well as offensive capabilities on NATO's part, and the NATO-Russia foundation pact ensured that the lack of offensive intention, on either side, was institutionalized. During the buildup to Kosovo, NATO openly discussed moving its headquarters from Germany to Poland, signifying the first time there was an intention to move infrastructure. Russian reaction changed immediately, when NATO intervened in Kosovo, and Moscow sent paratroopers to the Pristina airport to secure Russian strategic interests.

The September 11, 2001, terror attacks helped form a new, temporary alignment between Moscow and Washington, and the temporary transformation of NATO as a front against Islamic terrorism from a military alliance strictly focused on Europe, changed the perception in Russia. The subsequent War on Terror, and President George W. Bush's speech dubbing NATO as a political alliance of democracies instead of a purely military alliance, signified an even lesser-offensive intention on NATO's part toward Moscow, and it resulted in a diminished threat perception in Moscow. However, that thaw was momentary, as NATO patrols over the Baltics, and NATO's plans for missile defense shields all over Central Europe, demonstrated a new offensive capability as well as shifting geographical proximity of threat toward Moscow. That, added to Washington's support for democracy promotion, and a steady flow of offensive capabilities eastward under the Bush administration, resulted in a renewed skepticism in Moscow about the Western intentions of encircling Russia. Moscow's strategic doctrines reflected this change, and the Russian

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military elite, as well as the political elite, started to reconsider NATO as an enemy organization.

A more permanent break came with NATO's second phase of enlargement, as Russia, under President Putin, started to move away from the post-9/11 rapprochement with the West. While the conflict over Iraq resulted in Russia finding itself rhetorically aligned with France and Germany against Britain and the United States, a more permanent disruption happened with the Western support of color revolutions in former Soviet countries, as well as the NATO enlargement in 2004. It also marked a change in NATO's posture, as, up until then, NATO was at least nominally respectful of Russian aspirations as a great power. Post-9/11 American unilateralism, a permanent move of NATO firepower in the post-soviet territories, a permanent shift of NATO's hardware in the former Warsaw Pact countries, and a permanent and regular movement of assets over the Baltics close to the Russian military installations all signified a complete change of the balance of power in the region, and crossed a long-determined territorial red line for Moscow. NATO's offer of an individual partnership action plan to Ukraine and Georgia after the color revolutions, two countries that had hosted Russian troops, was another complete breach of a Russian red line, and signified a source of an existential threat moving inexorably toward Moscow. The rapid change of both offensive capability and perceived offensive intention, on NATO's part, was reflected in Moscow's military doctrines, as well as its political leadership, and this led to Vladimir Putin's infamous outburst in the Munich Security Conference of 2007. By the time the next phase of NATO enlargement took place in Albania and Croatia, Russian-Western relations were broken beyond repair, and a war over territory in Europe, for the first time since WWII, had already taken place. The Russian military doctrines in 2010 also finally reflected this new geopolitical reality, a position that has continued unchanged since.

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All the aforementioned evidence demonstrates that Russia behaves per the Balance of Threat theory, when it comes to NATO's aggregate power, territorial proximity, offensive capabilities, and intentions. The Russian behavior is in accordance with any realist power that follows the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory. The Russian threat perception rises with every phase of NATO enlargement, which, from the Russian perspective, is simply territorial expansion of a hostile entity. Each phase and movement toward the Russian border consolidates a Russian fear of encirclement by a hostile power. However, the Russian balancing action is dependent on offensive capabilities and perceived offensive intentions. Russia does not balance simply with any and every NATO enlargement, such as with Finland, Sweden, Montenegro, etc., but only when the enlargement is accompanied by increased offensive power. The shifting of NATO hardware, platforms, and bases are causes of concern for Russia with a heightened risk perception, as well as the lack

of offensive intention results in Moscow returning to status-quo position. And finally, the Russian red lines about NATO enlargement in Ukraine and Georgia are strictly dependent on strategic and military interests and not some arbitrary ideological determinants. The behavior of a great power is rarely explained by mono-causality, but the Russian behavior with regard to NATO expansion gives us a solid groundwork on the Balance of Threat theory, which is further corroborated in the cases of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine and Georgia.

Russian Balancing in Ukraine

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The evidence observed from Moscow's belligerence with Ukraine suggests realist motives, as well, and it is in accordance with the Balance of Threat theory. The history between Russia and Ukraine suggests a pattern of Russian escalation whenever there was a possibility that Ukraine was moving away from Russia's sphere to join the security infrastructure of either NATO or the EU—both, in this case, indistinguishable from Moscow's perspective. The difference between 2004 and 2014 was, therefore, in the scale of the Russian reaction. It was evident that in the case of Ukraine, the primary worry from Russia's side was Kiev slipping away. In both instances, Moscow adopted balancing behavior: In the first instance, economic pressure and the internal collapse of the revolutionary regime in Ukraine resulted in Moscow backing off and the status quo returning. In the second instance, the pace of the change was much more serious and the threat was rapid, leaving Russia no option other than using force to defend its strategic interests, as well as force a fait accompli in the region.

Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a serious player in the European balance, as Ukraine provides Russia with a defensible territorial buffer, as well as a gigantic market for Russian products, strategic resources, and supply chains, which are not replicable and are existential for Russian forces, as well as access to the Black Sea and navy port. Of course, with Russian nuclear weapons, it would still remain a great power, but that is irrelevant in this context, as first, great powers do not like giving up their own power and strategic interests without any pushback, and second, Russia has more to lose in the Ukraine than in the West. Russian actions in Ukraine, both after the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan, have, therefore, been that of strategic denial. In material terms, the gains to the Russian military after the annexation of Crimea were historic in terms of capabilities and future potential. Crimea was a potential problem for Russia, and Moscow was never happy with the legal constraints in leasing such a hugely strategic piece of real estate, and those constraints were swept away with land annexation by force and a permanent base for the Black Sea Fleet, Russia's primary European naval power

projection force. Moscow now controls the region as the largest naval power after the capture and interning of over twenty-five Ukrainian vessels, making it the larger power compared to its nearest NATO rival, Turkey, while stopping all future lease payments to Kiev, a hefty amount of funds to be potentially used for rearmament.

Second, the Russian balancing action also highlighted a limited approach focused on its strategic needs, instead of mere ideological expansion, both after the Orange Revolution, as well as after the Euromaidan revolution and the resultant civil war. In the early days immediately following the Orange Revolution, Russia deftly used its energy resources to coerce the fledgling revolutionary government of Ukraine, and the rhetoric continued to be harsh. But Russia also kept the diplomatic channels open with the local opposition, including pro-Russian politicians whom Moscow even supported during the election season. Moscow moved back to the status-quo position promptly after the victory of Yanukovych. Likewise, after the civil war began and Moscow rhetorically promoted the Novorossiya project, in reality, Russian-supported military actions were all localized conflicts, only in regions where Russia had direct strategic interests and supply chains located. For example, evidence studied suggests, very strongly, that Russian-backed forces were concentrated in the eastern regions of Ukraine, specifically those parts that produce hardware and mining products for the Russian military, and any ideological terms like those of the Novorossiya project were quietly dropped after a time.

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In short, there was no evidence of Moscow trying to spread the conflict in other parts of Ukraine, once it was satisfied that Crimea was annexed, the naval port was in Moscow's hand permanently, and the supply lines for Russian armed forces are intact. While the military decision-making of Russia is opaque, there are strong grounds to infer a logical restraint that demonstrates a status-quo power. The key difference between 2004 and 2014, and the reason Moscow went all the way to a military conflict, might be, therefore, attributed to the pace of change, as after the Orange Revolution, due to the dysfunction of the revolutionary regime, the threat of Kiev moving toward the EU and NATO was not heightened as much as after the Euromaidan revolution, with the flight of pro-Russian Yanukovych. But even in the latter case, once the strategic interests were safeguarded, Moscow pulled back instead of pushing forward with any more territorial expansion.

Ukraine's neighbors are also concerned with a conflict in the neighborhood, as well as a worry about refugees, and both NATO and the EU have given up on the ascension of Ukraine for the near-foreseeable future. This highlighted two lines of thinking: First, the Russian government was aware of the relative inferiority both in aggregate power as well as its allies, and the annexation of Crimea and the de-facto control over eastern Ukraine was the single-largest increase in relative power in favor of Moscow. Second, by the

simmering civil war, and proxy forces under Moscow's command, as well as being a party to the Minsk Accords, Moscow could control the tempo of fighting, and that was purely used as a bargaining chip for Russia's requirements. In fact, the Minsk protocol prevented a complete end of the hostilities, and thereby it perpetuated the status quo, which was the desired outcome from Moscow, given Russia's weakness. Kiev remains at a crossroad, without any help from NATO or the EU, dependent on Moscow still for most supplies, while Russia retains control of the Black Sea, a naval base, and enormous military infrastructure and hardware in the east of Ukraine. The simmering hostility itself makes Moscow the winner.

The primary drivers of Russian actions were, therefore, material and strategic, the aim being to maintain Russian control over naval bases and military industrial centers. While archival evidence is inaccessible, the pace of annexation suggests a well-planned operation and the existence of such plans in advance. Moscow's rapid transformation of Crimea attests to a contingency plan, as well. With ships added to its fleet, Russia now has extended control over strategic chokepoints in Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov, as recent skirmishes also prove. The balance of power in the Black Sea region remains in Moscow's favor, and the simmering conflict in the east acts as a constant message to Brussels and Washington that there are costs when Russian interests are ignored.

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Russian Balancing in Georgia

While the evidence from the NATO and Ukraine case studies provides some direct corroboration of the Balance of Threat theory, the evidence from Georgia is more important, as this was the first instance of a declared war by Russia with a fixed end date, and the Russian approach to war not only provides one of the strongest evidences for the Balance of Threat theory, but also the Russian limited military action provides a strong empirical refutation to the claims of Russian mindless militarism. In short, it is the evidence of Russian military aggression from Georgia, when studied in a broader, grand-strategic context that provides the strongest confirmation of Russia acting as a status-quo power with limited martial capabilities and intentions, prone to act only when confronted with perceived threats to its strategic interests. Russia, in reality, is afraid to lose its great-power status, and losing Georgia and Ukraine to the EU or NATO would essentially relegate Russia to the status of a second-tier player with no stake in the balance of power in Europe.

Evidence of the Russian war in Georgia suggests that first, Russia was thoroughly unprepared for any eventual conflict; second, that the Russian forces lacked the overall capability of occupying entire Georgian land; and third,

the Russian leadership had no inclination to do so. It is Georgia that provides the overall corroboration of the Russian status-quo behavior, and balancing against the threat that was evident and inferred from Russian conduct against NATO and Ukraine. The theoretical significance of the war is enormous, and it substantially answers two key questions: the Russian lead-up to the war, the conduct during the conflict, and the operation after the cessation of hostilities and neutralizing remaining threats before falling back to a status-quo position corroborate the fundamentals of defensive realism and the Balance of Threat theory, and Russia being a status-quo power. The second point, which is a final evidence to the inferences drawn from other case studies, is the only case with a declared conflict and fixed start and end dates, while direct evidence of the Russian decision-making process remains inaccessible from the Russian retrenchment after the conflict, it can be inferred that Russia is either incapable or unwilling to occupy Georgia or instigate a regime change. Whatever that might point at, it does not make Russia an expansionist power determined to change the balance of power of the region, much less aspire to be a regional hegemon.

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The Russian actions in Georgia did not reflect any bombastic rhetoric, pointing at the lack of a plan for regime change, and retrenchment from Moscow's side, the moment Russia was satisfied about achieving of strategic objectives, the objectives being retaining a Russian foothold and military presence in defensible terrain, having proxy regions for the Russian troops, and deterring future Georgian (and Western) adventurism. The lack of coordination of Russian forces were only offset by a Soviet-style mass movement and a heavy reliance on overwhelming manpower even with withering losses. As the hostilities ceased, the Russian forces were ordered for cleanup operations, which entailed every Georgian military infrastructure in the occupied territories captured during the war. The Russian government directives also led to the Russian units registering and interning surrendered weapons and platforms. The ceasefire essentially handed Russia de-facto control of the territories and buffer zones.

The primary drivers of the Russian aggression in 2008 were strategic, and Georgia, a potential candidate for NATO, came out vanquished, divided, and diminished in power, its military forces routed, and its reputation shattered as a belligerent. The political agenda of domestic reforms that started immediately after the Rose revolution was shattered and stopped after the war, as Georgia's belligerence and an unnecessary war was a huge blow to its reliability as an ally, and it resulted in draining resources, aid, and military investment, as well as the resultant shattered military infrastructures and hardware and American-provided equipment. The Russian strategic victory was manifold, including the control of breakaway provinces, which ended Georgia's sovereign writ over these regions that Russia considered to have immense

strategic importance, where it already had troop presents that Moscow feared losing. Russia also established itself as a primary powerbroker and net security provider of the region, including the energy and oil pipelines.

But more importantly, the Georgia war ended one of Russia's long-standing fears of NATO expansion in its borders. Russian red lines in Georgia, similar to Ukraine, was against NATO enlargement, which would have resulted in a new security architecture. By turning Georgia's provinces into a permanent frozen conflict, Russia indefinitely forestalled Georgia's accession to NATO. Georgia's own belligerence at preempting the conflict after Moscow's provocation meant that the EU and NATO countries were skeptical in adding Georgia to the alliance. Moscow thereby managed to achieve a balance of power and parity and the stability of a cold conflict zone. As tertiary benefits, the conflict added to Russian experience of fighting a modern war and showcased deep-rooted problems in the Russian military operational process, resulting in a massive, long-term, rearmament plan, especially focused on the command-and-control breakdown noticed during the operational phases of the conflict.

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There was no evidence of Moscow's plan, capability, or will for a regime-change operation or plans to oust Saakashvili, and as was expected from a status-quo power, Moscow demonstrated strategic restraint, condemnation of Georgia, and retrenchment. The Russian offensive, which was rhetorically justified as a "peace creation" operation, rather than a UN mandated peacekeeping, gave Moscow legal leeway to frame and shape the operation as it wished; however, it was never intended to defeat Georgia or change the regime. The Russian force concentration was insufficient and militarily unprepared, its operational procedures displaying a punitive, rather than a territorial interest. The Russian economy was also severely crippled and facing a downturn due to the 2008 global financial collapse. But the Russian objective—of creating a new fait accompli of stopping Georgia's revolutionary regime from joining any NATO/EU security structure, from stopping any loss of strategic territory that would result in the alteration of the balance of power of the region—was betrayed by Dmitry Medvedev when he bluntly stated there were regions in which Russia has a privileged interest. Everything else was simply rhetorical.

IS RUSSIA A REALIST GREAT POWER?

Can Russian behavior, balancing actions, and military aggression in Europe be explained by a framework of realism? Or in simpler terms, can Russian behavior be attributed to realist logic, and is Russia behaving like a realist power in Europe? The answer would seem to be a cautious yes. More

specifically, Russia acts per the dictates of the Balance of Threat theory, and thus it appears to be a defensive realist power, one that is cautious about strategic balance, willing to resort to force to defend established material, geographical, and military interests, and willing to fall back to the status quo when the perceived threats are neutralized. It is also not evident that Russian policymakers are under any impression that they can be an expansionist and hegemonic power even if they so desired, and repeatedly Russia's actual observed military and balancing actions have shown this disconnect from the usual bombastic rhetoric from the political class.

What can one conclude from the Russian behavior in Europe? Neorealism dictates that structural and material interests dictate the foreign policy of a great power. Material and military power determine states' balancing behavior, and the threat of loss provokes them to aggression. The Russian understanding of geopolitics has always been one of vulnerability. As John Mearsheimer wrote, the perceptions of threats are often decided by geography. A great power that never had natural defensible borders or terrain or sea, and one that has constantly faced invasion from the Mongols in the twelfth century, Lithuania and Poland and Sweden between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, to Napoleon Bonaparte, the Kaiser, and Hitler in modern ages, is wary of being surrounded or invaded by other powers. The Cold War–era containment, designed to limit Soviet power, resulted in an alliance structure opposed to Russian hard power and hegemonic domination in Europe. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, initially the Russians were Atlanticist, but with every phase of NATO enlargement, the Russians began to perceive a direct threat to their national interests. Moscow was acutely aware of its diminished position and the ever-diminishing buffer zone in Central and Eastern Europe.

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The understanding of a diminished strategic position is evident in the Russian military and political rhetoric and literature, as well as in its foreign policy. The desire to form or ensure new buffer zones was ever-present, and the formation and creation of institutions like the Confederation of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union are testament to that grand strategy. Countries in which Moscow already had a strategic presence after the collapse of the Soviet Union were therefore vitally important to Russia's aggregate power in Europe. Put simply, to use the terminology of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Russia ceases to be a European great power with the loss of Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Georgia.

On the other hand, Russia lacks the power and capability of the Soviet Union to conquer the majority of Eastern Europe. It frankly cannot even occupy the entirety of Ukraine. The strategy of Moscow therefore reflects one of weakening and dividing, to prevent further loss of power in the region. In

short, Russia's fundamental aim appears to be the prevention of Ukraine and Georgia from joining any Western security architecture, which would in one swift move decouple Moscow's supply chains, buffer zones, and naval ports and military bases in Europe. Unwilling to risk any military intervention or occupation, Moscow's favored strategy therefore seems to be either punitive deterrence (with Georgia) or frozen conflict and proxy wars (with Ukraine). This further demonstrates the lack of capability and intention of Russia being an expansionist power. While Russia's intention toward Ukraine and Georgia is undoubtedly hostile, it is still guided by a narrow strategic realism. Russia understands that losing Georgia and Ukraine would result in Russia being a non-actor in the European balance of power. Moscow has so far taken every possible action to neutralize that scenario. Moscow has also not attempted any continued expansion westward, like the Soviet Union did in the 1940s. However, one might judge Russia ideologically, a power-maximizing expansionist it is not.

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In Georgia, Russia ensured its privileged position was maintained through the "peacekeepers" that had already been posted there since the early 1990s. That was in itself the status quo to Russia, as that provided defensible terrain, a buffer zone, easy control over Georgia's economic and political decision-making, as well as a stake in Georgia's market. When Saakashvili decided to restore Georgian sovereignty over the breakaway provinces, Russia used the excuse of being the peacekeeper, as well as protecting Russian lives, to invade Georgia. In reality, it was a simple measure to stall the change of power, as Russia controlled these states and was perhaps in the process of annexing their regions, as well as their armed militias, into its regular army. Ukraine saw similar tactics, if not the same. Crimea already had the Russian forces, and the Russian troops staged a putsch, and a controversial plebiscite, to take control of the region over which it already had control and that it feared was changing hands. In both cases, Russia supplied arms to the separatist forces.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia had Russian-speaking populations, and Russia intervened militarily on their behalf and justified the intervention rhetorically as a way of securing human rights for the Russian-speaking people outside Russia, and also as a continuation of its historic peacekeeping role. Russia, of course, did not mention the Russian-speaking people in the Baltics, given that the Baltic countries are under NATO protection. Likewise, in Ukraine, the Russian-speaking population in rebel territories, like Donetsk and Luhansk, prompted Russian intervention, and Russian diplomacy heavily used the human rights tropes. In both instances of Georgia and Ukraine, the interventions came at a time when either the move toward a Western security architecture seemed irreversible, or there had been a direct change of relative power and the conflict had already started. In the former case, observed in

Ukraine, Moscow realized that unless they acted fast, all would be lost. In the latter case in Georgia, the conflict was initiated by the Georgian side. Both interventions fell squarely within Putin's red lines, about the unacceptability of Ukraine and Georgia falling into a Western sphere of influence. Russia lacked sufficient allies to balance against NATO. The actions were therefore aimed at securing the relative power advantage and denying strategic losses. The Crimean annexation, and the simmering war in Eastern Ukraine, keeps the supply chains and buffer zones in Russia's hand, while denying Ukraine a permanent move toward the West. Despite the bombastic rhetoric about continual human rights violation of the Russian-speaking people in the near abroad, and talks of Novorossiya in Russian media, nothing in the evidence explored suggests the Russian military and political elite was ever interested in absorbing Ukraine and Georgia. The continued low-cost conflict is far more conducive for the Russian strategic aims than the risk of a full-scale territorial conquest, as well as the resulting insurgency and civil war. At this point, due to frozen conflicts, neither Kiev nor Tbilisi can join NATO or the EU, nor are the NATO or the EU countries interested in any such enlargement. The Russian Black Sea Fleet is the strongest and most secure in the region, and the breakaway and rebel provinces in both Ukraine and Georgia are ruled by Russian satellites.

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As mentioned previously, realism of every school states that the world order is anarchic. There is no overarching authority, and each nation state is responsible for its own security, and more importantly, its own survival. To ensure survival, states undertake balancing and bandwagoning. Among neo-realists, offensive realists state that states pursue power maximizing, as maximum power determines maximum security. Defensive realists argue that states prefer security maximizing, as survival is the key, and unless external factors are involved, states are satisfied with security. In that regard, having a favorable relative power in a balance of power leads states to feel more secure. To manage threats and ensure maximum security, therefore, a great power tries to improve its relative power position alongside a prospective adversary. Nearly every single realist theory and sub-theoretical framework accepts this logic. The power difference is, of course, not a zero sum and to be in a favorable position in the balance, increase of one's power is as effective as decreasing the opponent's power, or defending and gaining on any sudden prospective loss of power. If a country is relatively weak, and without allies on which to depend, it seeks to increase power through its external actions. External balancing is more important for certain great powers than internal balancing.

From every observable evidence, in the last few chapters summed up here, one can say that the Kremlin, regardless of its administration, broadly follows the dictates of realism. It is a realist power, in the sense that Moscow's foreign policy and strategy clearly follow realist predictions. Moscow slowly

has attempted to rebuild its security buffer after the heady days of the early 1990s. With every phase of NATO enlargement, the idea that Russia is in a hostile relationship with the West has returned. Russian troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are now entrenched far more strongly that they were in the late 1990s. In Ukraine, Russia controls Crimea, and in lieu of that, it is the largest naval power in the Black Sea. There are Russian-controlled proxies in Eastern Ukraine, which are de-facto under Russian control. Neither Ukraine nor Georgia is joining NATO or EU anytime soon, and Russian trade is secure, as is Russian access to markets and the Russian position as a net security provider. Diplomatically, Russia is the arbiter of the Minsk Accords, in the sense that Moscow controls the militias in Eastern Ukraine, which can raise the tempo of the simmering conflict, and used that as a pressure point against Ukraine. Russia is also the cosponsor of the Geneva talks about the recognition of the breakaway Georgian provinces. From the Russian perspective, NATO, the United States, and the EU—all are hostile power centers, and the differences in interests are timeless. From the Russian perspective, it is therefore only logical to have buffer zones, and to increase or be in an advantageous relative power position compared to its adversaries. In reality, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea are all Russian provinces, either de facto or de jure. Russian "peacekeepers" in the breakaway provinces, as well as troops in the Crimean peninsula, serve under Russian colors and the Russian insignia. The proxy rebel groups in Eastern Ukraine are also essentially under Russian control. Russia stopped NATO enlargement in these regions, as well as any movement from these countries toward the EU. The Russian troops are now based as close as twenty-five kilometers from Tbilisi, and the Russian proxy militias are mere miles from Kiev. As long as this status quo holds, Moscow is the real winner in the European balance.

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To sum up the findings, one only need to quote the Russian Federation's Security Strategy, which states, "The strengthening of Russia is taking place against a backdrop of new threats to national security that are of a multifarious and interconnected nature. The Russian Federation's implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy is giving rise to opposition from the United States and its allies, who are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs." Highlighting the threats, Moscow makes it clear that "the build-up of the military potential of NATO and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security."[1]

"WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

There is currently a war going on in Ukraine, and given the reticence of NATO to join a potential nuclear conflict, the question of future policy is important. Given that this was a theory testing project, which aims to provide policymakers with the understanding of the Russian foreign policy from a theoretical perspective, the conclusion hangs or falls on the question of policy relevance. This book, therefore, attempts to conclude by charting a prospective way forward. So far, it is observed that Western, and especially an American, analysis of Russia falls under a simple binary. For liberal internationalists and neoconservatives, Russia under Vladimir Putin resembles Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, with a revisionist agenda and expansionist aim in the European continent. The evidence suggests that could not be further from the truth. Some realist analysis, on the other hand, puts all the blame on the West, especially on the NATO expansion. While that is partly true, that does not point to much. For example, if one follows John Mearsheimer's theory that states seek to maximize power, it neither explains why Russia displayed limited aims in Europe, nor does it posit why the United States would logically seek to limit its influence and give up hegemony in Europe. More to the point, Mearsheimer's own policy prescription does not say much about the future course of action; rather it attempts an autopsy of the causes of the Ukraine crisis, which is important, but incomplete.

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By every measurable index, the Western policy on Russia has failed. Russia is nowhere close to becoming a liberal democratic great power aligned with Western values and part of a responsible global family. In the United States, across three decades it was hoped that Moscow would either be fully defeated and become a fellow democracy, or there would be a regime change (or even a color revolution, so to speak) due to the inherent contradictions within the regime, and that anyone other than Vladimir Putin would come and change Russian grand strategy and reorient it toward the West. This was especially visible during the brief period when the Obama administration hoped to have a rapprochement with Dmitry Medvedev.

Unfortunately, Russia is not a liberal democracy, even when it is a democracy, and even with a demographic decline, it is still a major power on the world stage. Despite President Obama's jab that Russia is a declining power, and John Kerry's taunt that this is not the time to do nineteenth-century politics, Moscow has demonstrated that it packs a punch. While facing crushing diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions, Moscow has pushed back against Western interests, most notably in Ukraine and Georgia, and even when it is beyond the scope of this, at the time of the writing of this conclusion, in Syria. Moscow has also challenged and pushed the level of deterrence

blatantly in cyberspace. The bottom line is that Russia is not a power to be defeated, nor won over, and to hope for the collapse of the Russian regime is unrealistic. Hope, to paraphrase Thucydides, is an expensive commodity, and it is no substitute for policy.

So, what conclusions can we draw from the evidence explored? I suggest there are two dimensions to it: the political and the military aspect. Consider the political dimension first. Moscow's balancing behavior against NATO, and Moscow's definition of its own strategic interests, are timeless and not linked to any particular regime. In fact, there is a remarkable similarity that can be observed—and was observed under Yeltsin's final terms, Putin's first term, Medvedev's presidency, and Putin's second term. That calls into question the assertion prevalent in liberal analyses that the Russian regime type shapes Moscow's foreign policy. In reality, Moscow's foreign policy is determined by its strategic interests and falls squarely within centuries of Russian strategic thought, enjoying overwhelming support among the Russian military and political elite. It is unlikely that would change in the unlikely event of a liberal democratic president in Moscow. One, Yeltsin had a liberal phase. And two, Medvedev was nominally a liberal president, compared to Putin. Even Putin, in his first term, was solidly pro-American for a variety of reasons. None of that lasted, and Moscow fell back into a balancing mode whenever it felt its core strategic interests threatened, which included control over defensible terrain, threat of loss of naval ports, and threat of loss in regional balance of power.

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It is, therefore, imperative to understand that first, any future policy toward Russia would need to recognize the cause of Russian-Western hostility, and the cause is not the Russian regime in Moscow. Kremlin's undemocratic politics is not responsible for the Russian balancing behavior and military aggression, and the regime type is simply irrelevant in the broader Russian grand strategy. Second, the problems between NATO, the EU, the United States, and Russia are not ideological, nor are they because of Putin. They are geopolitical, and neither regime change, nor a new president from a different political party would change these problems, and in reality, Putin is still a beacon of stability in Russia. There is no guarantee that Russia would radically turn into Lichtenstein after Putin. Put simply, the major power interests of Moscow would remain, and any policy would need to accommodate those interests.

What can one understand from the study undertaken? Russia's interests include a buffer zone, with defensible terrain, out of logical fear of being encircled by an alliance that Russia considers militarily superior. Russian interests include advance infantry troop positioning, in regions Russia has occupied ever since the collapse of the USSR, a privileged stake at the markets for Russian exports, a steady supply chain and logistics for the Russian

military forces, and naval ports that guarantee the continuation of Russia being a great power. In short, Russian interests are strategic, material, and military, not ideological. That, in turn, leads to a logical conclusion. The chances of a rapprochement, or engagement, with Russia is possible if these interests are kept in mind. Moscow must be engaged through a balance of cooperation and competition, and the room to maneuver where interests are opposed must be dealt with in tandem with interests that run parallel or align. To take an example, Russia's concerns, with regard to Ukraine and Georgia, should be understood, and a neutral Ukraine and Georgia should be guaranteed instead of an inexorable push for those countries to join NATO and the EU and Western trade and security architecture. This is not a call to completely halt any further attempt to expand NATO, but a careful recalculation of regions where NATO can enlarge without affecting direct Russian military and strategic interests. In return, there might be areas of further cooperation, with regard to space research, WMD proliferation, and intelligence sharing, as was evident during the short phase of cooperation immediately after 9/11. Likewise, any further attempt to promote democracy and NGO activities in Russia, or throwing weight and support behind the opposition to Putin, or even supporting the spread of liberal institutions and liberal values in the Russian immediate neighborhood, might stoke rather than subside Russian paranoia about a covert push for regime change and color revolution in Moscow. It is prudent to remember that the framework from a Russian perspective is strictly strategic.

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In sum, there are two assumptions. First, Russia has a specific set of interests that are geopolitical, and not ideological or contingent to the regime in Moscow, and that need to be safeguarded and guaranteed, as well as kept in consideration during any policy formulation. Second, there are potential areas of rapprochement and engagement where interests overlap, and these need to be calculated. Russia is an adversarial power, but not a power determined to change the status quo. Russian aggression is predicated on what it perceives to be the established balance of power, and there is no evidence of any further expansionist aims in mainland Europe. That in itself points to a power with which there could be engagement based on common interests.

The second issue is with the Russian military threat. The Russian military suffers from massive disadvantages. The manpower of the Russian military is dwarfed by NATO forces. The Russian military also lacks in almost all domains of traditional power, speed, range, and technological advancement. The Russian force structure is not like that of the Soviet Union, and Russia lacks both the capability and the global ambition or ideological aspiration. However, the Russian forces, when improvised during operations, were able to demonstrate sufficient conventional capabilities in tactical and operational levels of warfare. While the overwhelming understanding in the Russian

political and military circle is that Russia is qualitatively inferior to NATO, the Russian military has shown an appetite for conflict against smaller adversaries, as a broader show of force and deterrence against what it considers NATO intentions and designs in Moscow's sphere.

Russia clearly considers NATO enlargement a threat, and it does not differentiate between the EU, NATO, and the United States as it is worried about NATO troops and armor next to the Russian borders. The Russian intention of safeguarding its own sphere of influence naturally leads to a clash of interests in countries like Georgia and Ukraine, which have expressed a desire to join Euro-Atlantic institutions. With Russia's return and rearmament, the expansion of the EU and the enlargement of NATO, and the erosion of a buffer zone, the chances of conflict have increased, even though there's no evidence of active American support to come into the defense of Ukraine and Georgia and risk a conflict with Russia.

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It is unlikely Moscow is planning such a war, or that it has any intention in initiating a war of conquest of Europe, in that scale, given its narrow security interests, goals, strategy, and evident capability. Moscow is also constrained by geography, demographics, economy, technology, industrial efficiency, and manpower. Moscow has also not faced any concerted pushback, and as per war simulation reports, Russia is infinitely inferior to NATO ground troops. This remains a dilemma for both NATO and the Russian forces. While the Russian force concentration in its near abroad is higher compared to that of NATO, and according to estimates Russia could conquer the Baltics within matter of weeks, before NATO even fully steps in, it is unlikely, given its performance in Ukraine. The Russian military literature, as well as its elite class, also points out that Moscow would not be able to prevail in a full-scale conventional war with NATO without resorting to nuclear weapons. However, recent years have demonstrated that Moscow could easily salami-slice regions and enclaves of countries that are still not part of NATO, which favors its regional balance and creates a new fait accompli.

NOTE

1. Vladimir Putin (2015, December 31), "On the Russian Federation's National Security Strategy," Presidential Edict 683, accessed July 11, 2017, http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf, cited in Heritage Foundation Europe Threats, https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessing-threats-us-vital-interests/europe.

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About the Author

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Dr. Sumantra Maitra is director of research at *The American Conservative*, a senior contributor to *The Federalist*, a senior fellow at the Center for Renewing America, and an elected associate fellow at the Royal Historical Society, London.

He has appeared as a foreign policy analyst on *Fox and Friends*, *Fox and Friends First*, and *The Tucker Carlson Show*. He is a former fellow at the Center for the National Interest and at the James G Martin Center for Academic Renewal. He is currently in the Heritage Project–2025 Presidential Transition team, and he has advised several congressmen, senators, and presidential candidates in a personal capacity.

His academic essays and peer-reviewed articles have been published in the *Canadian Military Journal*, *Centre for Land Warfare Studies Journal*, *Political Studies Review*, *International Affairs*, and the *International Journal*. His most recent paper was on the war in Ukraine and the lost opportunity of a grand bargain, at the *International Journal*, Canada, published in the spring of 2023.

He recently chaired the National Conservative Conference foreign policy panel in London, 2023, and has spoken at various others in the United States, the UK, and Europe.

Dr. Maitra holds an MA with distinction from SMU, India. He also holds a master's of international studies degree with credit from the University of Otago, New Zealand, where he was awarded a Coursework Masters scholarship, with distinctions in international politics, and global trade and macroeconomics.

He completed his PhD in international relations at the University of Nottingham, UK, with a Vice Chancellor's Scholarship in Research Excellence.

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